

Guitarist

• PRESENTS •

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'61 STRATOCASTER

PLUS many more
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CLASSIC & VINTAGE

GUITARS

SPECIAL THANKS TO

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Welcome

This collection of fine vintage and classic rarities is brought to you by the makers of *Guitarist*, the UK's longest-running guitar magazine. Since 1984, we've been privileged to have a procession of the best new guitar models the industry has to offer turn up at our offices for our experts to review. A few of those experts – some now entering the 'vintage' category themselves – have long memories and can remember seeing some of the guitars in these pages in shops for the first time, when they weren't jealously guarded collector's items in climate-controlled vaults, but were instead presented to the world's players as the Next Big Thing.

And this is what we think of when we see vintage guitars. Regardless of the inflated prices, the obsessive agonising over period-correct features and the arguments over thickness of lacquer, these instruments all started out as groundbreaking designs created for people to make better music, which have stood the test of time and earned their value as a result.

So we've put together a celebration of the finest vintage electric guitars we've ever laid eyes – or, if we're lucky, our grubby paws – on. For good measure, we've also mixed in some more recent classics, some curios favoured by star players, some painstaking reconstructions, and some modern guitars which we believe capture that elusive 'vintage vibe', and may one day be held in the same esteem. We've also asked some renowned vintage experts to have their say on playing and owning vintage models, and provided a bit of perspective on how we got here in the first place. Enjoy the issue...

Owen Bailey, Editor



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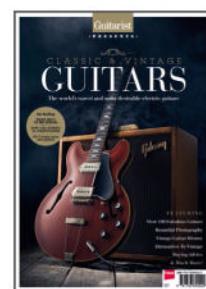
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COVER PHOTOGRAPH
Neil Godwin

HOW OLD BECAME GOLD

Guitar historian Tony Bacon reveals how musicians created the demand for vintage guitars – but set a runaway train of price increases into motion that condemned many classic instruments to life in a bank vault. But when the bubble burst, the speculators drifted away – and today musicians are reclaiming the past, seeking out old guitars they expect to play well, not pay well...

Words Tony Bacon

In 1967, Eric Clapton was asked what advice he'd give newbie guitarists. "When you're starting, always buy a second-hand guitar, because it will be 'broken in' and easier to play," he said, "apart from the fact that the older the guitar the better it seems to have been made." This was a very early sighting of what would become the 'vintage guitar argument'. In that one pithy sentence, it seemed obvious that Eric meant, by implication, that the newer the guitar the worse it seemed to have been made.

There was some truth in that generalisation. Electric guitars changed in the 60s, and many players found that those changes were bad for the instruments. CBS bought Fender in 1965 and started running it along big-corporation lines, with everything that implies. When a new president took over at Gibson a few years later, he was told the company had lost \$2 million in the previous couple of years, and that he should sort it out if he wanted to keep his job. In 1969, Gibson was sold to Norlin. The impact was similar to what had happened over at Fender.

Someone who worked at Gibson at the time described it thusly: "I'd think about people, about machines, about parts –

and these new guys would 'solve' all the problems with a calculator." A Fender salesman of the 60s told *Guitarist* a similar story. "Every time I walked in a store I found myself defending some poor piece of workmanship. We got very sloppy with the finish, with far too many bad spots, and the neck sockets were being cut way over size. So we created our own competition, letting the door wide open for everybody else, including the Japanese."

Vintage Is Born

A few specialist dealers had grown up in the States since the late-40s to cater for a similar demand already in place for old acoustic guitars, with people such as Harry West in New York City and Jon and Deirdre Lundberg in California among the first.

Fender and Gibson slowly woke up to the new interest in old electric guitars, but when they first reissued old models, in 1968, they seemed ridiculously wide of the obvious targets. Gibson reissued the wrong Les Pauls (a Goldtop and a Custom, when everyone wanted a 'Burst) and Fender skipped the obvious six-strings altogether, preferring to sort-of reissue the original Precision Bass (as the Telecaster Bass). Martin seemed a little more clued-up

when, some years later, it reinstated the herringbone trim on the D-28, which it renamed the HD-28, because it figured that players liked those little visual hallmarks of a vintage guitar.

It's not clear exactly when old guitars began to be called vintage guitars. The earliest printed example this writer has managed to find appeared in an American guitar magazine dated December 1973. It was in an ad for Guitar Resurrection, a shop run by Larry Jameson and Michael Stevens in Berkeley, California. There are probably earlier examples, but the terminology was certainly borrowed from vintage cars and vintage wine, to add a cachet to what we used to simply call second-hand. But with cars, the term is quite specific: a vintage car is one built between 1910 and 1930. With guitars, it's as recent as a dealer thinks he can get away with.

By 1975, guitarists were talking openly in interviews about the feeling that Eric Clapton had identified earlier, and that was now evidently spreading. Charlie Daniels, for example, said: "If a guitar sounds good and plays good, I don't care if it's a '58 or a '75. It just happens that most guitars that sound good and play good are old ones." A trend was settling in.

This 50s Esquire and '63 Bassman come from an era seen by many as a golden age for guitars and amps



Burst Case Scenario

We'll take the Les Paul 'Burst, ideally a '59, as our example in the land of vintage price hikes. This might be a good moment to pour yourself a stiff one. 'Bursts started life in '58 with a store price of \$247.50, and by the time they were dropped in 1960 they'd nudged up to a list price of \$300 or so. Keith Richards, Eric Clapton, Peter Green and their chums paid up to about £200 (about \$500 at the time) for second-hand examples in London in the mid- and late-60s, and in America players were paying anything from about \$80 to \$500. Already, there was a necessity to pay a premium over the original price to bag one of these lovelies.

By the early to mid-70s, old 'Bursts were up to the \$1,200 to \$2,500 range, and later in the decade some were pushing \$3,000. In the early 80s, a good one could hit around \$5,000 or more – although the differential between a knocked-about flameless example and a ding-less stunner was, and still can be, sizeable. Even the parts for a 'Burst can sell for big money today, if original, with pickguards and sets of pickup rings especially highly valued. Anyway, 1983 saw the first one go for \$10,000, and by the end of the 80s it wasn't unusual to see a prime example topping \$15,000. There was

a spike in vintage prices in the early 90s, with 'Bursts moving quickly from \$20,000 or so to \$100,000 and more by 2002. The two auctions of Clapton's guitars by Christie's in 1999 and 2004 are often seen as the triggers for a boom in collecting and, consequently, prices. By the start of 2008, a price guide showed a range of \$240,000 to \$420,000 for 'Bursts – but that was the year the Big Tumble happened, which we'll look at in a minute.

Of course, it wasn't just 'Bursts, Teles, Martins and 335s. Players, collectors and dealers sought out oldies from Gretsch, Rickenbacker, Dobro, National, Guild, Epiphone, D'Angelico and more, and there was a lesser scramble to find nice old examples from 50s and 60s makers such as Mosrite, Burns, Kay, Hofner, Danelectro, Vox, Hagström and Harmony with their cool, whacky or stylish features. There's also the matter of celebrity-owned guitars, an association that can disproportionately inflate the price of guitars. Guitar Center, the US music-store chain, paid a touch less than a million dollars for Eric Clapton's 'bitsa' Strat, Blackie, when it came up for auction in 2004. An obscure Vox guitar that George Harrison barely looked at went for \$657,000 in 2014. Jerry Garcia's Doug

"If a guitar sounds good and plays good, I don't care. It just happens that most guitars that sound good and play good are old ones"

Charlie Daniels

“Vintage-guitar freaks still chase vintage guitars. That really hasn’t changed since the vintage guitar boom started around 1970”

Kunio Kishida

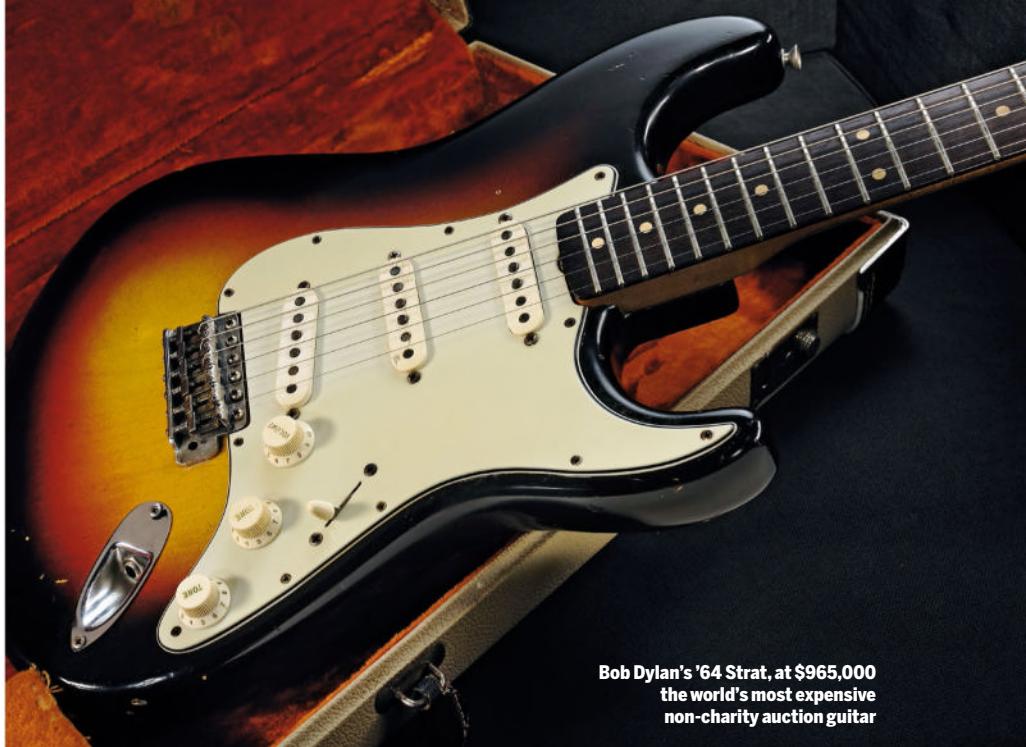
Irwin Tiger went for \$850,000 in 2002. And Bob Dylan’s ‘64 Strat, the one he went electric with at the Newport folk festival in 1965, sold in 2013, just pipping Blackie and setting the current non-charity auction record for a guitar at a grandiose \$965,000.

Collect Call

Collectors, too, fell victim to rock ‘n’ roll nostalgia – inflating the value of old guitars still further in their efforts to acquire pristine examples of the most celebrated models. By contrast, a pro player needs a guitar for a purpose, and will usually act a little more like a workman collecting tools. A collector who caused a big shake-up in the guitar world was Scott Chinery. In the late 80s, as a 20-something multimillionaire from New Jersey with lots of money to spend and a passion for guitars, Scott started to collect. With a vengeance.

He decided he wanted to construct a big collection of the best guitars. Some collectors felt that in the process, Scott paid too much and skewed the market. This writer worked with him in the 90s on a book about his collection, and we talked at length about all this. He expressed a common feeling among collectors. “I feel privileged that I’m in the position where I can take care of them, that they are preserved for future generations,” he said. “But I really am just a caretaker now.”

He did not have long to take care of them. Scott died suddenly in October 2000, at the age of just 40. Kunio Kishida is a pro player and a collector who runs the Nancy vintage stores in Tokyo and Nagoya, Japan. Despite his vintage habit, he also likes the modern reissues. These have improved tremendously since those first faltering steps back in the 60s and 70s. “In fact,” Kunio told us, “many vintage lovers have started to buy these new items. But new is new; vintage is vintage. Even if the new instruments are getting close to the



**Bob Dylan's '64 Strat, at \$965,000
the world's most expensive
non-charity auction guitar**

originals, vintage-guitar freaks still chase vintage guitars. That really hasn’t changed since the vintage guitar boom started around 1970.”

Guitar Crash

That vintage boom crashed in 2008, alongside the general economic crash. Walter Carter has written some great books about guitars, and today he runs Carter Vintage in Nashville with his partner Christie Carter. They worked for another Nashville dealer for many years, and Christie recalled that by early 2008, electric sales were dead. Martins stayed stronger for a while, but by the first few months of 2009, the vintage-guitar market was in danger of extinction. “It was in the toilet,” Walter says, “along with the rest of the economy.”

Before the crash, a lot of people bought choice old guitars at top-dollar prices, happy in the knowledge that for decades the general rule was they’d be able to sell them a little later for a profit. And sometimes quite a sizeable profit. But not anymore. Walter estimated that the market-leading vintage items took a dive of a scary 50 per cent or so. “Every other day, I’d have to talk to people who didn’t want to accept that their guitars weren’t worth what they paid for them. And that’s still the case.”

Today, he sees a brighter picture and reports that Carter Vintage is thriving in a more stable market. It’s not what it was, but now it’s maybe more attuned to the things that really matter. “These days, people pay more attention to sound and playability,” Walter says. “Just the collectability is not enough if it doesn’t sound good enough to justify the price. Especially in acoustics, and really for electrics too. I think people are more confident now than they were in 2009, a very incrementally increasing confidence. There’s confidence at least that the core items and the run-of-the-mill vintage things have stabilised. “And the younger acoustic

players that we see still go crazy about an old Martin; younger electric players still like an older Les Paul or a 335. They understand the value in those guitars.”

One of the older-generation collectors is Rick Nielsen, who got the guitar bug in 1965, aged 17, when he scored a ‘55 Goldtop for \$65. “I was a guitar-collector freak long before those instruments were called vintage guitars,” he says. “They were used guitars. I started off, I taught myself, and I never considered buying a new anything. Still don’t. It was well before the internet, and you had to hunt around. There wasn’t vintage guitar magazines or vintage guitar stores. You had to be on a mission. Which I always was.”

One of Rick’s favourites today from his superb collection is a ‘58 Les Paul that he got in the early 70s and has played a great deal. “It’s not the prettiest one – it just sounds the best,” Rick says. “I saw it in a music store. Even before we were Cheap Trick, every city that we’d go with the band I was in, I’d always look in the newspaper, I’d always go to the music stores. In those early days, those were used guitars. They weren’t ‘vintage’ – none of that junk. I believe I found it in Iowa. A long time ago. Probably paid 150 bucks.”

But what is it about these guitars, the ones we probably ought to call vintage guitars, that still excites us? “It’s a clichéd term, but they got the mojo,” Rick says with a smile. “They’ve played crummy songs, played good songs, they’ve been in a bar, they’ve been abused, they’ve been around the world. Or maybe they’re under your bed – who knows?” **G**

Sunburst: How The Gibson Les Paul Standard Became A Legendary Guitar, by Tony Bacon, is available now from Backbeat Books

www.halleonardbooks.com

Prices Then & Now

We compare how the values of these highly sought-after vintage guitars have fared since the market suffered a crash in 2008...



Pre-war Martin D-28 c1939

ORIGINAL LIST PRICE: \$100
c2008 VALUE: \$110,000
VALUE TODAY: c\$68,000

'Black guard' Fender Tele c1953

ORIGINAL LIST PRICE: \$189
c2008 VALUE: \$50,000+
VALUE TODAY: c\$35,000

Dot-neck Gibson ES-335 c1959

ORIGINAL LIST PRICE: \$282
c2008 VALUE: \$50,000+
VALUE TODAY: c\$35,000

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WHAT IS VINTAGE?

What defines a vintage guitar? We find out why old instruments ain't what they used to be – in fact, they're getting younger

Words Dave Burrluck

Vintage is a pretty vague term among many used to describe things from our past. If you have a 'historic' car made before 1 January 1974, in the UK you are exempt from vehicle tax. Some car insurers cite a 'classic' car as being just 20 years old. Then there's 'antique'. US Customs apparently classes a piece of furniture as antique when it's more than 100 years old.

'Vintage' in the wine market refers to a specific year, whereas in a less specific general market you might see a 10-year-old mobile phone advertised as 'vintage'; likewise clothes from the fairly recent past. In some markets, 'vintage' will refer to a known quality or rarity; in others, it's simply something that's not made anymore and gives us an insight into our past. For some purists, a so-called 'vintage' guitar might refer only to instruments made, for example, during Leo Fender's reign at Fender or Ted McCarty's tenure at Gibson – the formative, classic era of the electric guitar. But recently, the term 'vintage' has become elastic enough to include guitars from the 70s and even into the 80s.

Was it the market in old Italian violins that possibly formed the blueprint for the shrewd used-guitar dealer back in the day? Those great violins made by Stradivarius and others are things of myth and legend, and are worth millions of pounds.

There are fakes and forgeries aplenty, but in the classical world – even though many experts have failed to identify the sound of a Strad when compared to a contemporary

instrument in a blind test – they remain the absolute benchmark. Sound familiar?

And while the 1959 'Burst may be the thing closest to a Stradivarius violin in our electric guitar world, they were not, of course, made by a sole maker with a couple of helpers: they were made in a factory by factory workers. Yet there's little doubt that interest in the first wave of 'vintage' guitars was fuelled by a drop in quality post-Leo Fender and Ted McCarty. The 70s Strat or Tele was distinctly different to a 50s or early 60s example, with its thicker finish, three-bolt neck joint, and heavily coated maple fingerboard – not to mention changes in hardware and pickups. Gibson's Les Paul also saw changes, with altered neck and body construction and headstock angles.

In retrospect, it seems that they lost the recipe, but there was – of course – a different mindset back in the 70s: new was still deemed good, and guitars could be made of anything, including plastic and some pretty unusual woods. Meanwhile, the fledgling parts market introduced us to high-power replacement pickups, brass parts and active circuits.

As time moves on, so the goalposts of 'vintage' move: what was deemed inferior

in the 70s is now valuable and, yes, vintage. As one classic guitar moves into the stratosphere price-wise, the next affordable version becomes more collectible and its price rises. Elsewhere in these pages, you'll read how Tokai's copies and early 80s Japanese Fenders are becoming collectible: the 'new' vintage. Really?

A contemporary example of this is the early guitars made by PRS, especially in the first year (1985 to '86), when the company was learning its craft. To some, those guitars that have a smaller heel and Brazilian rosewood fingerboard are more valuable and deemed superior to the later instruments with a longer heel – specially designed to improve the sustain and tone of the guitars, by the way – and high-quality Indian rosewood fingerboards. Personally, I've yet to hear empirical proof that, as a fingerboard material, Brazilian rosewood sounds better on an electric guitar than Indian. As Paul Reed Smith has said, "as soon as I discontinue something, there's a demand for it."

The vintage guitar market is simply that: a market. If there's demand, an instrument's stock will rise, and vice versa. Be sure to tread carefully... **G**

In some markets, 'vintage' will refer to a known quality or rarity; in others, it's simply something that's not made anymore and gives us an insight into our past

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10 MOST WANTED VINTAGE CLASSICS

Imagine you had all the money in the world just to spend on guitars.
Sit back and marvel at the world's ultimate vintage shopping list...

Words Paul Day, Dave Burruck, Simon Bradley & Michael Leonard



Gibson ES-335

It's hard to imagine that back in the mid-50s the solidbody electric guitar was still seen as a joke by many players and even manufacturers: the small bodies put off many who were used to the much bigger, yet often lighter, archtop electrics.

The ES-335T, introduced in 1958 (from \$267.50), not only pioneered a 'thinline' body (1.75-inches at the rim) and double-cutaway shape for Gibson, it inspired many others like Gretsch. But the semi-solid's most innovative trait was to successfully bridge the gap between the company's archtop and solidbody instruments.

The access to the upper frets was superior to any of Gibson's hollowbodies or even the Les Paul; even today, it remains one of the most versatile electrics, being suitable for

virtually any musical style. The guitar was correctly renamed the ES-335TD (thinline, double pickup) in 1959 and the natural 'blonde' finish was replaced by cherry in 1960. The first samples had an unbound dot inlaid fingerboard, binding was added in late 1958, a shorter pickguard during 1960 and small block fingerboard inlays by 1962. A Bigsby was optional and by 1964, the stud tailpiece was replaced with a trapeze, yet it's the early dot-inlaid examples that command the top vintage prices.

Did You Know?

Gibson made only a scant 266 of its thinline, doublepickup ES-335TDs in 1962. Nearly 10 times that number rolled off the production line during 1967.



Gibson Les Paul 'Goldtop' Original 1950s

Gibson's first Les Paul signature model, launched in 1952, was a cocksure riposte to the emergence of Fender's 'plain' mass production electrics, the bolt-on Esquire and Telecaster. The Les Paul's carved top promised the hand-crafted allure of Gibson's best jazz guitars, while the rich colour positively screamed opulence – indeed, one of Paul's key inputs was to specify a gold-painted body ("it looks expensive"), and a mahogany fingerboard – ("it makes your fingers appear to move faster on the fretboard"). The whole, said Les, approvingly, "looks classy – like a tuxedo".

Tuxedo? Rock 'n' roll, the Goldtop was not. But rock 'n' roll didn't really exist back then. The original trapeze tailpiece didn't work too well, and was replaced by the tune-o-matic a few years later; the original neck angle was also too shallow for tuning stability; plus those single-coil pickups wouldn't have sated proto-rockers anyway. But undoubtedly, it's an icon; not only of all the following Les Pauls, but of 'special' guitar colours too.

In a post-war world, the Les Paul 'Goldtop' was electric guitar bling at its finest, and its rarity alone makes for huge prices: back at the height of the vintage boom, *Guitarist* remembers finding (claimed) originals offered for up to \$24,000. Gold dust, indeed.

Did You Know?

In 1952, Gibson didn't use any serial numbers on their solidbodies. They were introduced in 1953, with the first number denoting the last digit of the year the guitar was made.

Gibson Les Paul Standard 1958-60

A misnomer in retrospect, the '58-'60 Standard is now perceived as the most unique guitar in the collecting world. With Gibson consigning 'Goldtops' (for then) to history, in 1958 they settled on a new sunburst finish. Notably, the guitars' maple tops were now visible. The woods on some offered an almost-3D 'flame' or 'figure'; on others, the ultraviolet-sensitive dye of the tops faded in natural light, making for a more uniform yellow-ish brown – the 'sunburst' became what collectors now call 'unburst'. Either way, many pieces were – to a very keen eye – individual.

There were various minor changes in the guitar's short original life, such as fretwire, neck profile and jack plate, but the model wasn't at all popular at the time.

Its mellow/fat tones could be good for jazz; but jazz players generally preferred hollowbodies. And early rock 'n' rollers preferred the brighter tones of Fender's Strat and Tele. Hence, Gibson discontinued subsequently taking on the SG outline (until 1968).

Single-cut Les Paul Standards may have remained unloved too, but for the likes of Eric Clapton and Mike Bloomfield who revved them up in the mid-60s blues-rock explosion; to many, these white bluesmen's revival of the Standard's hidden potential kickstarted the whole 'vintage' guitar phenomenon we now know and love/loathe. Only 1,712 original 'sunburst' Les Pauls were made from 1958 to 1960, making those first Standards museum pieces. Maybe only 20 per cent had significant 'flaming' on their tops, but that just makes the prices worse.

The mojo-laden '59 owned by both Peter Green and Gary Moore was offered for sale for an incredible \$2m. You'd have to sleep under canvas for your life, but – hey – you'd get to drool over an original battered 'Burst by moonlight...

Did You Know?

The 1958-60 shipping totals of Gibson Les Paul Standards were 434 ('58), 643 ('59) and 635 ('60). The most 'flamed' – and thus most desirable – are those from 1959.





Fender Stratocaster 1954-59

The Stratocaster featured radiating curves and comfort-conscious contouring, very different to the straight-edged Telecaster. This all-new six-string was more of a team effort and answered many of the criticisms levelled at its stablemate, but Leo and co took the concept further by adding another pickup and a radically different vibrato bridge assembly.

Launched in 1954, the Strat looked light years ahead of the competition, and all this innovation actually hindered initial sales. However, it soon gained acceptance with

the new breed of rock 'n' rollers, headed by a bespectacled Buddy Holly, plus players like bluesman Buddy Guy.

During the late-50s, Fender offered alternative colours and gold-plated metalwork as custom options. This topcost combination attracted Shadows' lead guitarist Hank Marvin, whose specially imported Fiesta Red Strat quickly became the group's trademark. A pristine '54 sunburst could cost upwards of £15,000 and even original custom-colour examples are so rare you can pay a significant premium.



Fender Stratocaster Early-60s Custom-Colour

As with the Telecaster, the Strat wasn't allowed into the UK until 1960, so Hank Marvin's maple-necked example was one of very few seen here. Early-1960s spec spanned a rosewood fingerboard and white laminate scratchplate, but little else had altered in any major way.

At least custom colours were now an official option, although the UK importers usually stuck with just sunburst or Fiesta Red; the former catering for Buddy Holly

wannabes, while the latter was for those who hankered after Marvin. No one seemed to complain about such a severely limited choice – times were much simpler back then! In looks and sound, the Stratocaster was the ideal tool for the many Shadows-inspired instrumental groups springing up across Britain, although cost (around £160, £3,000 in 2015 money) made it a dream machine for many. You'll pay even more now, mind you...

Fender Telecaster 1951-54

Leo Fender may have needed three goes at naming his initial electric guitar creation (Esquire, then Broadcaster), but he got everything else pretty much right first time. Introduced in 1950, the Telecaster was *the* pioneering mass-production solidbody. Simple construction kept costs down, but the end result was very effective, delivering bags of twang and sustain. This proved ideal for country music, Fender's initial target market, but over the past 50 years, the Tele has successfully seen service in just about every musical style imaginable.

Leo Fender was engineer first, designer second, and the Tele is all about function over form: and while it's comparatively short on curves and contours and high on hard edges and straight lines, many players prefer the no-nonsense Tele to its more streamlined stablemates. For the first four years, Leo clad his creation in butterscotch blond with a contrasting black pickguard; this marks out the most desirable examples, because blackguard Teles have assumed iconic status, helped by the patronage of Keith Richards, Bruce Springsteen and others.

Did You Know?

Rather than bakelite, the black pickguard was made from various other materials, including fibreboard, patterned Formica or circuitboard-style phenolic, and then sprayed.





Fender Telecaster 1960-64

An embargo on US-made imports after WWII meant Fenders weren't officially available in the UK until the start of the 1960s. By then, a rosewood fingerboard was standard, so we missed out on those lovely all-maple alternatives! The only other major change concerned the scratchplate, which switched to plain white in 1954, and then to a white laminate almost a decade later.

The Shadows ruled the roost in the UK at the time, and almost every player lusted after a Fiesta Red Strat. Lacking a third pickup and de rigueur wobbly bit, the Tele was regarded as a poor relation and tended to be relegated to rhythm, an image reinforced when Shadow-man Bruce Welch employed one for a short spell. However, players like James Burton, Steve Cropper and Pirates mainman Mick Green provided powerful proof that the Tele was certainly not strictly for strummers. Even so, a general lack of respect and its easily-stripped slab body made the Tele a prime target for modifying, which means all-original examples are now hard to find.

Gretsch 6120

1954

Although Gretsch can boast arguably the most sought-after vintage guitar of them all – the ultra-rare 1958 PX6134 White Penguin (originally listed at \$490) can be yours for a mere £40,000 or more – it's the Southern-fried 6120 that will surely remain at the top of any Gretsch collector's tree. Colloquially referred to as the Nashville, it was initially released in late 1954 as the Model 6120 Chet Atkins Hollowbody, priced at \$385. The body was 15.5-inches deep, and therefore offered what Gretsch proclaimed was 'a new look'.

There have been many re-releases of both original and streamlined specs, examples of the latter being the numerous Brian Setzer signatures. Vital characteristics of originals to look out for include various stylised Western-themed accoutrements such as a steer's head rather than horseshoe headstock inlay, the so-called cows-and-cactus fingerboard livery and a gold-plated B-6 Bigsby vibrato complete with a fixed rather than bent arm. Look out for DeArmond single coils and a 'signpost' scratchplate, too.

Models from 1957 demonstrate an overly scarlet hue to the curly maple body, but guitars from 1954 to '56 are much more likely to exhibit what most of us would consider a classic, and thus more valuable, finish; that of Amber Red, commonly described as Western Orange.

Did You Know?

Food-for-thought for all those 'branding' professionals: the main (italic capitals) Gretsch logo has remained essentially unchanged since 1939.



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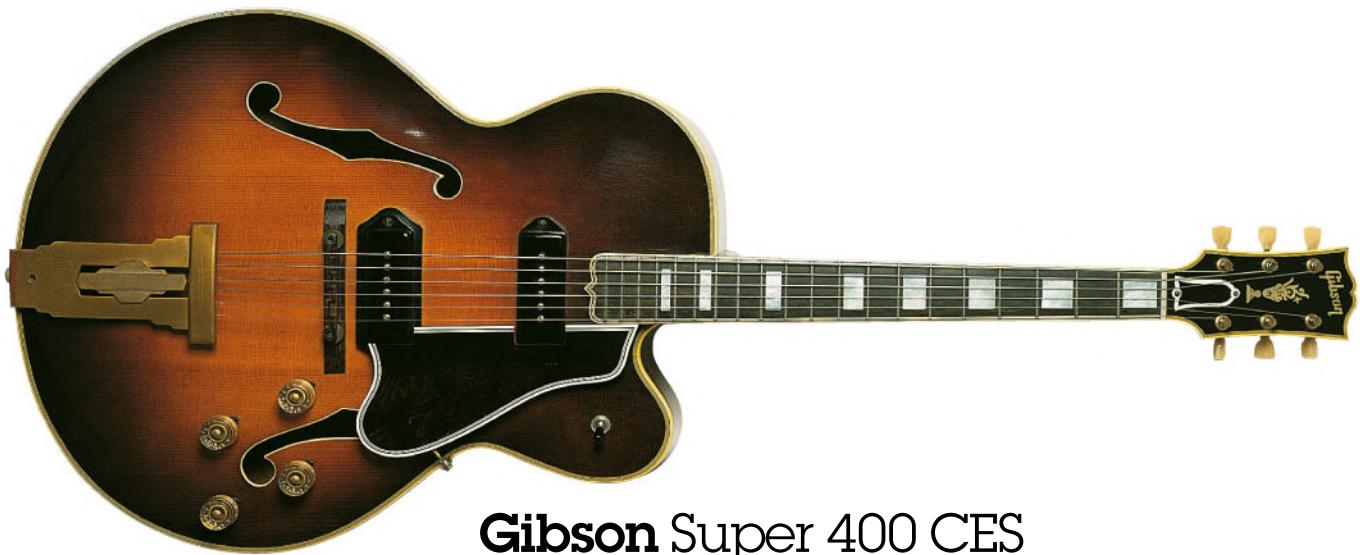
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Gibson Super 400 CES

The epitome of Gibson's archtop history, the Super 400, with its huge 18.5-inch-wide body, debuted in 1934 as a non-cutaway acoustic archtop. At the time, it was the largest and most expensive archtop guitar available, costing \$400, hence its name. After WWII suspended Gibson's guitar production, the Super 400 reappeared in 1947 and a Venetian cutaway was offered in 1949. The electric version appeared officially in 1951 and the all-solid wood construction continued, the electric version having a slightly thicker spruce top. The first version featured dual P-90s and along with the L-5CES was the first of Gibson

electrics to feature the two volume/two tone controls and three-way toggle now ubiquitous with the brand. It was Gibson's most expensive electric guitar, and prime 1950s examples can command premium prices. Of the many famous Super 400s, Scotty Moore's 1963 model is one of the most iconic: it was the guitar Elvis played during his 1968 TV 'Comeback Special'.

Did You Know?

Scotty Moore sold his Super 400 CES to a collector for a mere \$10,000. He told Chet Atkins he sold it so cheap because he needed a new tractor.



Gibson Explorer 1958

With the original Flying V and mythical Moderne, this formed Gibson's 'Korina trio', introduced in 1958 and intended to show the company could be as radical as the rest. However, like the Flying V, the angular Explorer was ahead of its time, enjoying next-to-nil reaction with sales to match and only a comparative handful were produced. Its arrow-shaped amigo was favoured by Albert King and Lonnie Mack, but the Explorer found few friends. Eric Clapton did go exploring during the 1970s and Gibson's former dead duck has since come good, courtesy of the assorted reissues and variations of the past three decades.

Appreciation has been increased by the Explorer's association with influential modern players, such as U2's The Edge, who appreciates the design's distinctive, ever up-to-date styling. Edge's is a 1976, but 1950s originals remain some of Gibson's rarest production solids and among the few guitars to approach the Les Paul in value. A 1958 could even cost close to three figures.

Did You Know?

Gibson shipped a few Explorers in the early 1960s. Made from leftover carcasses and later components, they are identifiable via their nickel-plated metalwork.

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Gibson



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GRANDIOSE GIBSONS

Gibson's historical product line contains an embarrassment of vintage riches. From curvaceous ES-175 jazz archtops, through seductive semi-hollowbody thinlines such as the ES-335, all the way to vintage guitar's Most Wanted, the 1959 sunburst Les Paul Standard – step this way to see some of the greatest Gibsons ever to leave Kalamazoo and Nashville

'51 Gibson ES-5

Back in its day, Gibson lauded its ES-5 as the "supreme electronic version of the L-5"

While the upstarts at Fender took a gamble on their futuristic new solidbody guitars, the Broadcaster and Esquire, Gibson's early 50s designs still evoked the golden age of jazz. Grand, glitzy and beautiful, the ES-5 is a perfect example of that design philosophy, with its 17-inch wide body and upmarket five-ply binding round the pointed-end rosewood 'board. This example, recently in stock at Vintage & Rare Guitars in Bath, has a trio of P-90 pickups, each with its own volume control, while a single master tone knob is mounted on the cutaway bout. This unwieldy control layout was updated in late '55 to 'Switchmaster' spec, with the addition of dedicated tone controls for each pickup and a four-way switch. Plugged in, its old-school tone is glorious, with all that air inside adding a full but controllable bloom to each note. For such a grand-looking design, it's also surprisingly comfortable to sit and noodle with – the narrow-ish neck has a slender C-shape profile, and although the tiny frets don't encourage big bends, those Scotty Moore licks pop out like a charm. As hollowbodies from an earlier, grander era go, the ES-5 is a beauty.





'64 Gibson ES-175D

Gibson's cheaper alternative to its L-5 archtop became one of the most popular jazzboxes ever

Gibson's ES-175 debuted in 1949, and was the first electric to feature the Florentine cutaway. The ES-175D (denoting its double pickup configuration) debuted four years later, and this particular specimen belongs to jazz great Steve Howe, who's owned it since the age of 17. "When it arrived, I remember plugging it into my Fender Tremolux and thinking, 'It sounds exactly like Kenny Burrell!'" Howe told *Guitarist*. "I'd sit and listen to records just looking at it – almost meditating on it – and I played it as much as I could.

"I fitted a fancy inlaid bridge years ago, and these knobs are from a late-fifties guitar. I also got a [Kluson] machine head and whittled the tuning button down and fitted it as the pickup-selector toggle. It's had one re-fret, a couple of years ago, by Tim Stark at Manson guitars. It's amazing that I let anybody do it, but it had a couple of buzzes in predictable places that I was tired of working around. But he did a brilliant job."

'64 Gibson Barney Kessel Custom

This signature model is a serious jazz guitar that's so sophisticated, it even has bowties for inlays

Introduced in 1961 alongside a less ornate 'Regular' model, Gibson's Barney Kessels remained in production until 1973. The original 1961 list prices were \$560 for the Custom and \$395 for the Regular version. A longer heel with 14th-fret join was phased out by 1964, as you can see from this example, part of the collection at Guitars: The Museum in Umeå, Sweden. Physically huge with a long, Super 400-style headstock and a 17-inch lower bout, these instruments are wonderful jazz guitars, although Kessel appears to have favoured a 1940s Gibson ES-350 with a Charlie Christian pickup for stage and studio work. It may not have been the most enthusiastic of endorsements, but the Gibson BK guitars at least fared better than Barney's previous Kay signature models, of which he reportedly stated: "I don't play that Kay – it's a terrible guitar!"





'58 Gibson ES-225T

An early thinline whose ephemeral production makes it a rare and a sought-after vintage find

It was in production for only a handful of years, but along with the Byrdland and ES-350T, the ES-225 was one of Gibson's first thinline hollowbodies when it launched in 1956. While its outline, complete with Florentine cutaway, was borrowed from the ES-175, its slimmer body depth made it a more comfortable proposition for players. The 225 offered different tonal possibilities, too, thanks to a single P-90, which – as on this example from Guitars: The Museum in Umeå, Sweden – was positioned between the bottom of the neck and the bridge, as opposed to the usual single-pickup bridge placement. Related ES-225TD models (1956-1958) featured a pair of P-90s in the usual positions, as on the recent reissue from Gibson Memphis. Aside from the glorious yellowed cream binding around the Sunburst finish, one of this 225's most eyecatching figures is the almighty wrapover 'bail' bridge and tailpiece, a similar configuration to P-90-equipped Les Paul Goldtops of the early 50s (but note the strings pass over the bar here), which has a slightly looser playing feel when compared with a typical tune-o-matic-style arrangement. But while the 225 was off the production line by the end of 1959, its under-the-radar status means that, with a bit of luck, you can snag original 50s examples for around £2,000.



'68 Gibson ES-335 12-string

This sunburst specimen came to Bernard Butler by way of Johnny Marr, a fan of the rare 12-string 335

Bernard Butler – who burst onto the scene with Suede as one of the most exciting guitarists of the Brit Pop generation, has since established himself as a solo artist and an award-winning producer. He's also a guitar connoisseur, and when *Guitarist* caught up with him recently, he took us for a tour of his impressive collection, which included this rare 12-string ES-335.

"I went up to visit Johnny in 1995, and we played guitar together and watched Neil Young videos all night," Butler recalled. "Just before I left, Johnny said, 'I want to show you this,' and got out this 12-string. I told him I recognised it from The Smiths on *Top Of The Pops* and *Sheila Take A Bow* and *Shoplifters Of The World Unite* on *The Tube* in 1986; specific songs. He just said, 'I knew you'd know all that... so you take it.' Amazing, but Johnny's always so generous to me. We play very differently which, believe me, wasn't my intention when I started. This is the main guitar on The Smiths' *Stop Me If You've Heard This One Before*, and I wrote [debut solo single] *Stay* on it. A special guitar."





'58 Gibson ES-335

A stunning example of a rare Natural-finish ES-335 from the model's debut year

"This used to belong to Larry DiMarzio. Extremely rare," says Guitars: The Museum's Samuel Åhdén of an instrument fit to make any self-respecting guitar addict weep with desire. Though the long pickguard extending past the bridge pickup was retained until late 1960, it's the lack of fingerboard binding that marks this particular guitar out as a dead cert early '58 example. The company shipped only 50 Natural models that year, with or without binding, so you'd likely have more luck adding a bantam hen with a full set of gleaming gnashers to your collection than one of these beauties.

'55 Gibson ES-350T

With one of these slick-playing hollowbodies in hand, Chuck Berry redefined rock 'n' roll

In the mid-50s, Gibson decided to combat the solidbody guitar with a series of three guitars which, while still retaining some glitzy archtop features and styling, had thinner bodies and narrower necks with shorter 23.5-inch scales to enable easier chord stretches and faster lead lines. These were the budget ES-225T, the mid-range ES-350T and the Byrdland (so-called because it was designed in conjunction with Nashville session players Hank Garland and Billy Byrd).

The 1955 ES-350T, which we see here courtesy of Guitars: The Museum, has a figured maple body, P-90s and a rounded Venetian cutaway; specs were later updated with twin gold PAF humbuckers in 1957 and a curved Florentine cutaway in 1961, and the model was discontinued in 1963. Many famous players have favoured the ES-350T, but none have been more influential than Chuck Berry, who played one on his early era-defining recordings for Chess, including *Maybelline* and *Johnny B Goode*.





'52 Gibson Les Paul

The visionary guitar Les Paul helped design, and which bore his name, has retained its golden glow

This historic Goldtop, belonging to the Guitars: The Museum collection, hails from 1952 – the year of its release – and is in such spectacular condition it could have rolled out of Nashville last year, let alone Kalamazoo over 60 years ago. Back then, Les Paul was the best-known guitarist in the USA, and marketing wisdom dictated that adding his signature to the headstock would virtually ensure sales to budding pickers everywhere. And yet, the twin-P-90 model – Gibson's first solidbody – met with a lukewarm reception at odds with its regal bearing, and within a couple of years, the stylish, all-black Les Paul Custom upstaged it to become the vehicle for Gibson and Les Paul's refinements to the pickups, neck angle and tailpiece assembly.

'60 Gibson Les Paul Standard

The sunburst Gibson Les Paul Standard is the original collectible vintage guitar

The 1958–1960 Gibson Les Paul Standard has since become – through a combination of its sheer utility, rarity, market hype and simply by being in the right players' hands at the right time – the Holiest of vintage Holy Grails. This 1960 model from the Guitars: The Museum collection shows precisely why the hype (if not the crazy pricetag) is justified in the minds of guitar nuts everywhere.

Even in today's relatively chastened vintage market, you'd still expect to pay a six-figure sum to feel the weight of its 'Burst mahogany body and the drive of its PAFs: but then, it is the same historic tone that the likes of Eric Clapton, Peter Green and Keith Richards redefined blues and rock guitar with, and how do you place a value on that?





'72 Gibson Les Paul Deluxe

A commercial afterthought that remains an underrated example of the breed to this day

The chequered history of the Les Paul Deluxe model began with the demise of what is today regarded as the Holy Grail for collectors: the '58 to '60 Sunburst Les Paul Standard. Ironically, it wasn't a commercial hit at the time, and was discontinued in favour of the SG-shaped Les Paul model. Yet by the mid-1960s, Eric Clapton and other notable players started praising the quality of the original 'Bursts, causing demand for 'old' examples to shoot up. By 1969, faced with declining sales, Norlin-era execs decided to capitalise on this demand by resurrecting the Les Paul. With a surplus stock of Epiphone mini-humbuckers to use up, Gibson elected to fit its new Sunburst LP, dubbed the 'Deluxe', with these pickups, changing both the visual identity of the guitar and its tone and alienating many of the purists it had no doubt hoped to entice. A four-piece maple/mahogany laminate 'pancake' body further distanced the Deluxe from its heritage, while the optional 'Standard' version with two full-sized humbuckers, offered from '72 to '76, was too little, too late.

These days, however, we can perhaps enjoy the Deluxe on its own merits as an often formidable-sounding variant of the breed, with abundant bite. Scott Gorham was a notable player of the model, and it's hard to imagine Thin Lizzy's steely, harmonised lead lines without the wiry presence of his Deluxe in the mix.

'57 Gibson Les Paul Junior

Players from Leslie West to John Lennon have been drawn to the incisive tone of Gibson's student model

Released in 1954 alongside the more upmarket Les Paul Custom, Gibson's Les Paul Junior was aimed squarely at the budding student-guitar market of 1950s America. Its flat (not carved) singlecut body sported a lone P-90 pickup, and a list price of \$99 – less than half that of the Goldtop – made it the best-selling electric of 1955. Its simplicity appealed to successive generations of rock players, among them Dave Gregory, formerly of XTC and the owner of this prime example, who was inspired to buy it after seeing Mountain's Leslie West riffing with his: "When I got it, sure enough there was Leslie, fast asleep in this guitar," he told us.





'61 Gibson Les Paul Junior

A transitional treasure that's a versatile and toneful tribute to design simplicity

In 1961, Gibson was busy transforming its entire Les Paul line, ostensibly to revive interest in its solidbodies, but also, it seems, to completely confuse future guitar historians. As well as radically transforming the bodyshape of the flagship models into what we now naturally think of as the SG shape, the company applied its new ultra-slimline doublecut body design to the Les Paul Junior, to the SG TV, to the SG Special, and to the SG Special Three-Quarter. During 1963, Gibson then proceeded to drop the Les Paul name from the redesigned Junior, and in its catalogues and other promo material, gradually renamed it the SG Junior.

This lone-P-90-toting 1961 SG-shape Les Paul Junior is owned by Daniel Steinhardt, founder of TheGigRig. "They're surprisingly versatile," Daniel told *Guitarist*. "I've used mine with Marshall Plexis, a Tweed Deluxe, Vox AC30, and it brings something to them all. They're remarkably full-frequency and resonant: whether you're just using the guitar to push the amplifier or whether you're using pedals into a very open-sounding amp, Juniors just work."

'55 Gibson Les Paul Junior

This pared-down Les Paul is one of only a handful of this model with this finish ever to leave the factory

Many a guitarist has at some time asked themselves the pertinent question: is two pickups one too many? "One pickup and two controls is all you need. It's very rare and an extremely good lead guitar," says this Les Paul's owner, Guitars: The Museum's Samuel Åhdén. It's rare, all right: estimates of how many made it out of the factory like this before Gibson moved to a brighter 'TV' hue that popped better on television range from between five to 20.

The Vox is an AC30/6 Twin Top Boost; the model here features a black grille cloth, which superseded the previous brown, and saw the previously rear-mounted treble and bass controls for the top boost circuit relocated to the main, now grey, control panel. In combination with a no-frills rock 'n' roll guitar such as this '55 LP, it's a pretty damn raunchy sound.





'59 Gibson Les Paul Special

This double-cut from Gibson's 1950s student model line has become a vintage cult classic

Introduced in 1955 as a step up from the single-pickup Junior, the single-cutaway Les Paul Special was still considered a 'student' model, and priced accordingly. The double-cut incarnation arrived midway through '58, with the TV finish now distinctly yellow in hue. Gibson's November 1959 price list saw the Special cost \$195, versus the \$265 Standard, while the Custom topped the range at \$395 (\$470 with Bigsby). None of those prices included a hard case, which was an additional \$42.50.

1959 saw the Special's pickup selector switch moved from its original position between the treble volume and tone pots and relocated closer to the bridge (as seen here), while just weeks after this example was shipped, neck pickups on new models were moved approximately half an inch closer to the bridge unit in order to strengthen the neck joint. The guitar pictured has a chunky D-shaped neck and bags of sustain and resonance. Don't believe the hype about wraparound bridges, either; the intonation is bang on!





The checking on the nitro finish replicates a life at sea



The neck is heavily relic'd with convincing player wear

Gibson Collector's Choice #18 1960 Les Paul 'Dutchburst'

Gibson's slavish reconstruction of a Les Paul that lived its life between the Low Countries and the high seas

Gibson's recent Collector's Choice series presents limited-edition recreations of specific '58 to '60-era instruments. The woods used are as near-perfect a match as possible to the originals they're modelled on, and the specific instrument this 'Dutchburst' is modelled on was bought in the Netherlands by a professional guitarist (we know him only as 'Jan'), who played jazz in his trio, mainly on cruise ships.

Gibson has recreated the years of wear and tear obsessively, although the finish is less dulled than on most VOS models. Its moody 'tobacco fading to burnt umber and caramel'

finish is complemented by its tones, coming courtesy of period-correct Scatter Wound Custom Buckers, and sonically, all the usual quality Les Paul clichés apply. According to *Guitarist*'s very own Les Paul aficionado and former guitar repairer for Gibson, Neville Marten, Ol' Dutch is "expressive, dynamic, woody, powerful-but-not-mushy, bright-but-not-piercing... If you're a guitarist who gets the whole vintage thing, a guitar like this is a joy to behold, a thrill to play and exhilarating to hear." High praise indeed, and goes somewhere towards justifying the once-in-a-lifetime price tag of £5,799.





'58 Gibson Flying V

This icon of the space age has held rock and blues players in its thrall for generations

On its launch in 1958 as part of Gibson's Modernist Series, the Flying V shared a \$247.50 price tag with the Les Paul Standard. Gibson's design chief and president Ted McCarty had begun developing prototypes the previous year, likely inspired by Cadillac tailfins and the Atomic Age optimism that fuelled a general enthusiasm for all things futuristic that even saw the Ford Motor Company design the Nucleon, a nuclear-powered concept car. Though the originals didn't sell in sufficient numbers to sustain initial production beyond 1959, artist association – Lonnie Mack, Albert King, Jimi Hendrix – and sheer cool would eventually help the V attain legendary status. With just 81 Flying Vs leaving the factory in 1958, this beautiful original model on display at Guitars: The Museum in Umeå, Sweden is comfortably in the 'Burst bracket when it comes to monetary value.



'64 Gibson Firebird I

Gibson's groundbreaking 1963 electric was intended to ruffle the feathers of the company's great rival, Fender

Gibson's mixed successes with radically shaped space-age models (the Flying V, Explorer and mythical Moderne) back in the 1950s wasn't sufficient to deter company head Ted McCarty from hiring car designer Ray Dietrich to go 'one crazier' in 1963. Dietrich's Firebird was as space-age as its predecessors, sporting 50s automobile tailfin lines, a through-body design and an elongated treble horn; of the four models initially released, the VII was top of the range, on account of its three mini-humbuckers, gold hardware and Maestro Lyre Vibrato tailpiece. The cheapest model of the first 'reverse body' style of Firebird was the I (1963 to '65) – the Les Paul Junior of the line.

The Firebird I featured here belongs to ex-XTC guitarist Dave Gregory, who's a full-blown Firebird aficionado. "The first one I bought was the Firebird III, a '65 non-reverse," Dave recalls. "I got it

on the first American tour I did with XTC in 1980, at a time when it still made sense to buy guitars in the States and bring them back. I was window shopping, looking for a Rickenbacker 12-string – and I went into a shop in Detroit. There was this mint Firebird III hanging on the wall – I think they were asking \$500 – so I decided to buy it because it was so clean. But later, I discovered it didn't play very well: it hadn't been set up, didn't stay in tune. But I just liked looking at it!"

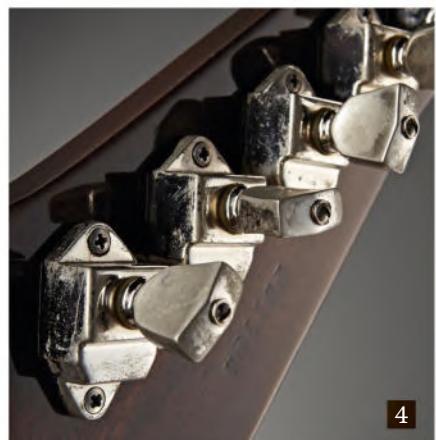
His collection now includes a '65 non-reverse Firebird V and a non-reverse Firebird I, with its duo of P-90s. He says that poor factory setups and fret dress are common on many vintage Firebirds. Dave also suggests that vintage Firebird owners slacken or remove their scratchplate screws in storage, because the 'plates tend to shrink over time and break around the screws otherwise. Sound advice!





ROXY LADY

THIS 1964 Cardinal Red 'reverse-body' Firebird VII belongs to Roxy Music guitarist Phil Manzanera, who employed it to great effect (and with great effects) to add snarl and bite to the band's experimental art-rock sound... He still uses it to this day. When he bought it in 1972, from an ad in the back of *Melody Maker*, he admits to being bowled over – first by its looks, and then by its recorded tones. "Those pickups are different from standard humbuckers or P-90s," Phil told *Guitarist*. "They have a very contained sound, which doesn't spread a lot around the edges into other frequencies, so if you have distortion it sits very nicely within the whole spectrum. And then your clean sound is unique, too. It also has an amazing tremolo unit – certain guitars are just magic. You just play notes and it sounds great. It's so special, that guitar – it's a different kind of heavy sound when you use it with distortion: it just sits nicely within songs."



1. The Firebird I had a simple wraparound bridge-tailpiece; the III had a stud-style bridge and simple Gibson/Maestro Vibrola unit; and the V and VII came with a tune-o-matic bridge and a Deluxe Gibson/Maestro Vibrola, with a decorated cover. The metalwork was nickel-plated on the I, III and V, and gold-plated on the VII

2. The Firebird was Gibson's first thru-body guitar design. It had a four-inch central multi-laminate mahogany-and-walnut section running the length of the guitar, providing the 22-fret neck and the mid portion of the body in a single unit. Two thinner mahogany 'wings' were glued to the side to complete the body

3. The Firebird had a hornless upper section that made the lower horn appear to stick out further than it really did. It made for an almost unbalanced but quite pleasing look, which is why we call original models 'reverse body' or simply 'reverse' Firebirds

4. The six Klusons were banjo-style tuners, with string-anchors on the treble side of the head and buttons protruding from the rear, hidden from a front view

5. The headstock was a kind of flipped-Fender shape. The low E string fed the furthest tuner, the opposite of how a Fender head worked



Gibson SG

Gibson's evolution of the Les Paul has become a mainstay for rock and blues players

Gibson's SG (Solid Guitar) was originally launched in 1961 as a radical metamorphosis of the Les Paul, and for two years, it bore his monicker, until Paul's waning popularity and stated distaste for this modernist twin-cutaway curio saw him part ways with Gibson. The success of the Les Paul Junior among the new breed of solidbody-loving rock 'n' roll guitarists must have influenced Gibson's decision to go with a slim slab mahogany body with twin cutaways, allowing access to all of the SG's 22 frets and also providing the instrument with its idiosyncratic, 'flappy' neck – a feature which saw pressure applied to the neck affect tuning stability, a trait much beloved of certain players.

In the hands of Pete Townshend, Clapton and Angus Young through Tony Iommi, Frank Zappa and beyond, the SG has come to hold a unique place, both tonally and visually, in rock 'n' roll history.

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THE AUCTIONEER

Auction rooms are pulse-quicken places. With buyers intent on taking home a bargain – but willing to bid high on the right vintage guitar – winners and losers are separated by just the nod of a head. We asked Luke Hobbs, who wields the hammer at guitar auctioneers Gardiner Houlgate, for his tips on buying classic instruments at the right price

Words Jamie Dickson

What's the state of the vintage-guitar market today? "It peaked in 2008 and it's been a steady decline over the last few years. I personally think it's now levelled out a bit, but one would hope it'll increase – although I think it'll stay level for quite a while. One factor may be that buyers of the 'baby boomer' generation, who once invested in collections of guitars from their era, are now selling those guitars before they pass away – or they do pass away and their families are left to clear their estate – and these guitars are flooding onto the market, which tends to bring prices down a bit. And, obviously, the recent recession hit every market. I'd say we're about 30 to 40 per cent down on where we were before 2008."

Which vintage guitars are hottest at the moment?

"Americans are snapping up wacky European guitars, such as vintage Hagströms, at the moment because they're a bit different and there's not a lot of them over there. Teles seem to be hot, too: Stratocasters have gone down a bit and Teles have taken over. That could just be a complete fashion thing, though. With regards to Gibson electrics, people are going nuts for anything with original PAF pickups in, because even the pickups alone have so much value in them. Which is why just a year of difference [in date of manufacture] in something like a 335 can make a hell of a lot of difference, value-wise."

What vintage guitars are affordable but on the rise?

"Well, Japanese guitars of the 80s, I suppose. Certainly Japanese Squiers and Fenders just go up and up and up, probably because of the build quality, which often rivals that of many US guitars – and also when 60s guitars got too expensive, suddenly 70s guitars became 'vintage' and people started investing in them. Now people are buying and selling 80s guitars as vintage, but it's not actually that long ago. Nonetheless, they're falling into that market – although decent Japanese guitars are still relatively cheap. Tokai guitars are getting a massive name, the 80s ones specifically,

"At the end of the day, you're not going to be attached to the monetary value, but what the guitar means to you"

though they were copies of Fenders and Gibsons. It's a similar story with 80s Grecos, Burnys and so on – and they're typically built really well. So if you want a guitar that plays well, that's still relatively cheap but which will go up in value I think that's the way to go."

How about amplifiers?

"English amps. With guitars, the British guitar market isn't that strong – even vintage Burns guitars, although Zemaitis guitars are an exception. But with amps, we do rule on that side: the 60s copper-panel Vox AC30s are commanding very big prices now. The pale AC15s are also commanding high prices, and even the tiny Selmer 'Little Giant' amps are fetching good prices. When we first started going into the guitar thing, we were getting maybe £100 for them, but I've known them sell for £300 in recent sales."

What are your tips for getting a vintage guitar bargain?

"I always advise people, if you're going to put money into vintage guitars then just buy something you like playing. I collect guitars myself, but I'll only buy things that I like – because at the end of the day you're not going to be attached to the monetary value, which can fluctuate, but what the guitar itself means to you."

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IS VINTAGE DEAD?

With new relic'd and road-worn guitars available for a fraction of the price of their aged ancestors, is vintage really worth the outlay?

Words Dave Burrluck

If we are to believe that so-called vintage-market values have dropped some 40 per cent since 2008, it still means a stunning, original-condition '53 Tele is worth tens of thousands of pounds. So, yes, as they have been for some time, the classic pre-CBS Fender and McCarty-era Gibson 'vintage' guitars are dead to most of us: unreachable. But is the influence of those classics dead? Absolutely not! Old, or at least what looks old, is still highly desirable to many of us.

At a recent jam session, there were three guitar players on stage and one bassist – all sported what looked to the audience (mainly guitar players, natch) like old Fender guitars. One guitar was a complete fake; the other two were Fender Road Worns – all three, despite their worn finishes, were less than three years old. Ironically, it was only the bassist who was playing a 'vintage' instrument: an early 70s Fender bashed up a bit by hundreds of hours' playing. "I love my old Fender," blogged one of the Road Worn-toting guitarists later on. Old-looking, yes; old, no.

A while ago, I had internationally renowned vintage restorer Clive Brown paint a new PRS CE body like a 1950s Goldtop, as well as ageing an original nitrocellulose-finished CE neck. I put on some old-ish looking covered humbuckers, and on its first gig, during the break, another guitarist was looking at it on its stand: "Ah, the old ones are the best, aren't they?" Even a high-ranking PRS employee remarked of my fake vintage PRS: "It looks and feels like an old PRS... it even sounds like one!"

The advantage we have today, of course, is that something that looks old might well be a 'better' guitar in terms of its fretting, intonation and playability; if the wood was seasoned properly before the build

process, it might well sound acoustically very similar, too, especially if it sports a thin finish. Install some ultra-high-quality, vintage-style specific boutique pickups and you might well find you have that '1953' 'black guard' Tele for a snippet of the original's price – and one that you really don't have to worry about at a gig, or insure for silly money.

There's little doubt that with all the contemporary research into why classic-era guitars – the good ones, at least – actually sounded so good. Today, off the shelf, we can easily buy a guitar that looks, sounds and feels pretty close to a real vintage piece without any worry about value or originality. It won't need a re-fret or new pots, either.

Improvements in quality control over instruments of the past means that it's quite possible you won't have to rifle through eight or nine to find a good one. Also, if you fancy installing a humbucker in the neck position of your Road Worn, you won't be destroying potential 'investment' value.

For any musician, feeling comfortable with their instrument is paramount. Does a vintage or even vintage-looking instrument sound better? How long is that piece of string? But if that instrument – new, old, bashed-up or pristine – makes you feel better, then surely you're going to play better? Don't be fooled by myth and legend, or even fashion. The 'best' guitar is simply the one that suits you and the style of music you play. **G**



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2000 FENDER STRATOCASTER IN RARE SAGE GREEN METALLIC MINT	£875
1989 FENDER STRAT PLUS SURF GREEN RARE COLOUR EXC	£1200
2007 USA FENDER STRATOCASTER AMERICAN STANDARD CANDY COLA RED METALLIC MINT	£850
1989 USA FENDER STRAT PLUS IN BLUE PEARL BURST NEAR MINT STUNNING	£1200
1989 FENDER AMERICAN STANDARD DELUXE "RARE" DAKOTA RED	£1100
1983 USA FENDER STRATOCASTER "DAN SMITH" BLACK, 3 CONTROLS, VGC	£1300
1979 FENDER ANNIVERSARY STRATOCASTER USA ALL ORIGINAL	£1700
1966 FENDER STRATOCASTER FOAM GREEN - ORIGINAL PARTS WITH REFIN BODY	£POA
1972 FENDER TELECASTER CUSTOM WITH BIGSBY ALL ORIGINAL, MET RED	£POA
1972 FENDER JAZZMASTER SUNBURST, ROSEWOOD BOARD, ALL ORIGINAL	£2250
1982 FENDER BULLET H1 DAKOTA RED MAPLE BOARD USA ALL ORIGINAL	£575
2006 FENDER STRATOCASTER CUSTOM SHOP SPECIAL ORDER, METALLIC FLAMINGO PINK	£1200
1963 FENDER JAZZMASTER FOAM GREEN -	£POA
1962 FENDER JAGUAR SURF GREEN REBUILD/REFINISH	£3500
1994 U.S.A. 40TH ANNIVERSARY FENDER STRAT, CARIBBEAN MIST, AS NEW!	£1100

Gibson

1965 GIBSON B15 ACOUSTIC GUITAR EX JOHN HIATT VGC	£850
1957 GIBSON ES125T SUNBURST NEAR MINT WITH ORIGINAL LIFTON CASE	£2200
2005 GIBSON LES PAUL JUNIOR WHITE WITH LOLLAR P90	£700
1990 GIBSON LES PAUL CUSTOM USA EBONY	£1850
1976 GIBSON THUNDERBIRD "BICENTENNIAL" BASS	£2450
1997 GIBSON ES5 REISSUE ANTIQUE SUNBURST CUSTOM AND HISTORIC WITH CASE	£4000

Misc

1960 GRETsch DOUBLE ANNIVERSARY PAF SINGLE CUTAWAY SUNBURST	£2500
1988 USA RICKENBACKER 230 HAMBURG MAPLEGLOSS	£750
PARKER P36 RED 'GATOR SKIN' ULTRA RARE EXHIBITION GUITAR WITH CASE	£650
PARKER FLY DELUXE BLACK ORIGINAL MARK I 2000 USA	£1800
RKS WAVE USA RARE COMPOSITE BODY RADICAL DESIGN EARLY ORIGINAL	£1000
KARNAK OSIRIS II, (ULTRA RARE) 1985	£850
GUS G3 BARITONE SERIAL NUMBER 002 RARE EXOTICA	£POA
1997 HERITAGE SWEET SIXTEEN, NEAR	£3000

Acoustic

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CLASSIC & VINTAGE GUITARS

FABULOUS FENDERS

Nocasters, Broadcasters, early Stratocasters, Jags and Jazzmasters...
Fender's legendary guitar models are responsible for the large majority of
vintage-guitar folklore, and some of the very rarest and most desirable we've
come across are lined up here for your delectation

'50 Fender Broadcaster

The first-ever mass-market solidbody was a masterstroke of pragmatic engineering

Leo Fender's Broadcaster was the first mass-produced solidbody electric guitar; an ingenious instrument designed with an engineer's love of practicality firmly in mind. From its twin pickups with contrasting tone and bolt-on neck with newly installed truss rod, to its feedback-eliminating alder body, every decision made on the drawing board was to prove an enduring and unqualified success. In fact, the only mis-step was the name: as is well-documented, Gretsch had already copyrighted its Broadkaster drum kit, and the Telecaster was born. This example, from the first year of its release, belongs to Guitars: The Museum.





Fender La Cabronita 'Luchador'

Fender's Custom Shop pulled out all the stops with this Cabronita-flavoured take on the Strat

When Mike Eldred of Fender's Custom Shop took the Telecaster outline, added TV Jones Filter'Tron-style pickups and modified the pickguard, he created a new species of Fender model that proved hugely popular, and led to a whole new product line. "I wanted to make something that was going against the grain of what a normal Tele would be like," Eldred told *Guitarist*. "Something that didn't sit in the normal box, and challenged people who normally play Telecasters."

The model shown is a limited-edition Strat-shaped variant, named after the Spanish for 'wrestler'. "The Strat is a Luchador," Eldred told *Guitarist*. "We came up with that because I took Billy Gibbons to Mexican wrestling out here in Mesa, Arizona one night. And I'm like, 'Yeah, that's kind of cool!'"





'51 Fender Nocaster

Fender's famous guitar with no name has become a Holy Grail for vintage collectors

Players of a certain mindset might assert that if you can't do it with the combination of an early 1950s Telecaster and a '58 Bassman then you are doing it wrong. Staunch purism aside, even the modernists among you will likely find your hearts all aflutter at the sight of this pair of sassy blondes.

The instrument on the left is one of two 'Nocasters' at Guitars: The Museum, in Umeå, while the 1954 Telecaster on the right showcases all of the features that were phased in during the second half of that year: a White Blonde finish, a single-ply vinyl scratchplate and the steel saddles that further brightened the Tele's already twangsome tone. That 'butterfly' string tree is presumably a later addition, as they didn't arrive until mid-'56. The '51, meanwhile, has a round string tree and slot head screws, as an original Nocaster should. It looks as if it's been played a whole lot more, too...



'53 Fender Telecaster

An early example of the Telecaster sporting many of the model's all-time classic appointments

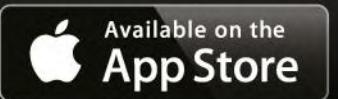
Following its evolution from the single-pickup Esquire – and despite Broadcaster naming wrangles – the Telecaster began life on the production line in February 1951. In its initial decade of production, some of the most intriguing changes took place within the guitar's control cavity. Initially, the pickup selector's bridge position activated both pickups, with the tone knob used to adjust the amount of neck mixed into the bridge-pickup sound – this was simplified at guitarist Bill Carson's urging in 1952 to output the bridge pickup on its own with tone control, as it is today. Meanwhile, the middle position delivered the neck pickup only with tone control, while the 'neck' position activated the neck with extra capacitance for a bassier tone and no tone control. This was the so-called 'dark' wiring format. This example, from the third year of production, has been modified for the control configuration that became standard in the late 1960s – bridge, both, neck. There's no doubt as to the circuit's origins, though: tucked inside the control cavity is a small piece of paper bearing the name 'Gloria,' in reference to Gloria Fuentes, a Fender factory assembler who installed the pickups back in 1953. On the outside, this Tele is every bit the part, too, with a Butterscotch Blonde-finished ash body, black pickguard and trio of brass saddles, recalling iconic guitars of Bruce Springsteen et al. And as for the tone, it's wonderfully balanced in the neck and middle, with plenty of treble available from the bridge – it's good to know nothing's changed!



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'54 Fender Stratocaster

Here's where it all started – a first-year example of the world's most enduringly popular electric guitar

Ask any kid with a crayon to sketch a guitar, and this is what they'll draw: the Fender Stratocaster, the best-selling and most famous design of them all. This original 1954 specimen, from the year of the Strat's debut, currently resides at Umeå's Guitars: The Museum, and if you could see it with fresh eyes, imagine what a mind-blowing spectacle it would've been for the musicians of the era.

The body contouring, versatile and musical Synchronized Tremolo, the adjustable saddles on the sprung, string-through-body bridge assembly and the offset third pickup were perfectly in tune with both the demands of the working musician – thanks to the input of Western Swing guitarist Bill Carson – and the horizons of the space age that inspired its name. Little wonder, then, that Fender's masterpiece went on to dominate popular music, and remains, pound-for-pound, the most versatile electric guitar design, a whole six decades later.





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Rory Gallagher's '61 Fender Stratocaster

Up close and personal with the 1961 Stratocaster played almost to destruction by the late, great Rory Gallagher

Rory's famous '61 Strat, the one he played so hard that only a few jagged islands of lacquer remain on its body, while its reverse still bears a faint blue sheen from his jeans, is truly one of rock's iconic instruments. Reputedly the first in Ireland, it was originally ordered by a player in another showband; but he wanted a Hank-alike red to complement new stage outfits, not the sunburst that arrived. When the red one appeared, this went back to the shops: Rory bought it, on just under £100 credit, a few months later.

Heavily modified due to the duress of a thousand boiling-hot gigs, nowadays, the Strat's neck and body are among the instrument's few remaining original parts: the scratchplate, tuners, two of the pickups and the five-way pickup selector are all non-stock. Perhaps the biggest change it underwent, though, is the most obvious – the original three-tone Sunburst finish, dissolved by its owner's sweat over the years, is a testament to the love this uniquely skilled and much-lamented workman had for this simple tool.





1. The headstock's Fender logo has all-but disappeared
2. Rory was once offered a near-identical Strat, with a serial number just one digit out
3. From the pickups and pickguard to the selector switch, Rory's '61 was extensively modified
4. Beneath that backplate, the vibrato has been blocked up with a mahogany wedge between the back of the vibrato block and the body cavity



2



3



4

JOE BONAMASSA

On playing Rory Gallagher's '61 Strat

"Growing up, I'd read about it, I'd seen it on the covers of *Irish Tour '74*... y'know, it was Rory Gallagher's iconic battered Strat. Before the Hammersmith gigs, my girlfriend says, I got you your Christmas present. That night, in walks Dónal Gallagher [Rory's brother] with a gigbag, then out comes the '61 Strat: when that comes into the room, everybody knows what it is. So that was a pretty heavy scene for me. They left it in the dressing room, and I didn't want to leave because it was like, I'm responsible for this thing.

"It's a great Strat, just at face value. It's loud, it's punchy, it's articulate, when you roll the volume down it cleans up nice, but then it roars like a Gibson. We happened to have *Cradle Rock* in the set, then I used it for *When The Fire Hits The Sea*, and I kept it on for Gary Moore's *Midnight Blues*, y'know, because it's two Irish guitarists and here's this American kid who was really influenced by them. I've played my share of vintage guitars and I'll say this: he's played that guitar so much there's a little divot on the body where his right arm started working into the wood, and divots on the neck where I could tell what position he'd play in. He's definitely played it to its maximum potential.

"I never thought I'd play a special guitar such as that. But it wasn't hard to give it back. When you have an iconic guitar – an irreplaceable item – you feel the weight and responsibility of it. That's the family's guitar. It shouldn't be anyone's but Rory's. I can't thank Dónal enough for that moment. It was really super-special."

'62 Fender Stratocaster

As the Strat's popularity rose, Fender tweaked it and introduced small but significant variations

The dawn of the 60s ushered in a decade of change for Fender: while the Stratocaster's popularity was soaring thanks to the likes of The Beach Boys, Dick Dale and Hank Marvin, it wouldn't be long before the company was bought out by CBS in 1965. Even before the takeover, the Strat underwent a number of significant changes, perhaps most notably in the fretboard department. From 1959, a 'slab' rosewood 'board with the underside milled flat was standard. During 1962, Fender switched to pre-radiused maple necks fitted with a uniform width, 'round laminate' rosewood cap that followed the curve. This gorgeous example features the earlier slab arrangement; the shape of the rosewood section behind the nut is a dead giveaway. The other key indicator as to this Strat's age is the green-hued scratchplate, a result of the three-ply white/black/white celluloid nitrate pickguard's centre section bleeding into the other layers. Shrinkage over time often leads to cracking around the neck pickup's bass-side screw, too, also seen here. These 'guards were replaced in 1965, but there's something magical about the way they discoloured. Combine that with the guitar's effortless playability, and this has us green with envy...





'63 Fender Stratocaster

By '63, the Strat had evolved into what is, for many, the definitive version of the classic model

For many players, the Strat reached its apex in the early 60s. The reputation of guitars from this era among players was such that when Fender's fortunes were waning in the early 80s, after buyers had become disillusioned with CBS-era Strats, a slab-'board 1962 model was selected as the basis for a new series of historically accurate reissues that helped turn the company's fortunes around. By 1963, however, the Strat had moved on again. To address production problems Leo Fender had experienced with slab-fretboard necks, he introduced round-laminate 'boards part-way through 1962, which entailed gluing a thin, curved layer of rosewood onto the top surface of a maple neck that had already been cut to the correct radius. It was a trickier piece of workmanship to complete and marked a new phase in the guitar's development.

This battered but beautiful '63 Stratocaster in Fiesta Red is currently on show at the vintage Valhalla that is Guitars: The Museum, a permanent exhibition that opened in Umeå, Sweden, in February 2014. It's a long journey north, unless you currently reside at the Pole, but if you want to feast your eyes on this gorgeous slice of Strat history, you could do a lot worse than pay a visit.





Philip Sayce's '63 Fender Stratocaster

Blues-rock guitarist Philip Sayce is one of the Strat's finest and fieriest exponents. Here, he takes you to meet Mother

Welsh-Canadian blues-rocker Philip Sayce is the proud owner of what's left of this 1963 Strat. "Her name's Mother," he told *Guitarist*. "And I'm very lucky to have her." Yet as commonplace as a fake battered Strat may be among the blues-rock fraternity, this one, like Sayce himself, is the real deal.

The only mods Philip has made to his mainstay are the two bridge saddles, the pots, the addition of a resistor on the volume circuit to retain treble when the volume control is rolled down, and Dunlop 6000 fret wire. The keen-eyed will have noted Mother's multicoloured flecks of paint finish, which Philip explains: "Back in the day, Fender painted them all sunburst and somebody

would call up and say, 'We need a white one', so they'd just spray white over the Sunburst."

Sayce also has a 1962 Stratocaster with a round-laminated rosewood fingerboard, so he's well-placed to settle any disputes about the differences, if any, that maple and rosewood necks make to vintage Strat tone. "That '62 sounds more like a 1950s maple neck – it just has a woody twanginess to it... [due to the round-laminate rosewood 'board's fret tangs going into the neck itself]. It's because there's less rosewood. On the '63, too, there's not a lot of wood left on here, so these tangs are going far into the maple. It makes a difference – any slab 'boards I've played have been darker."



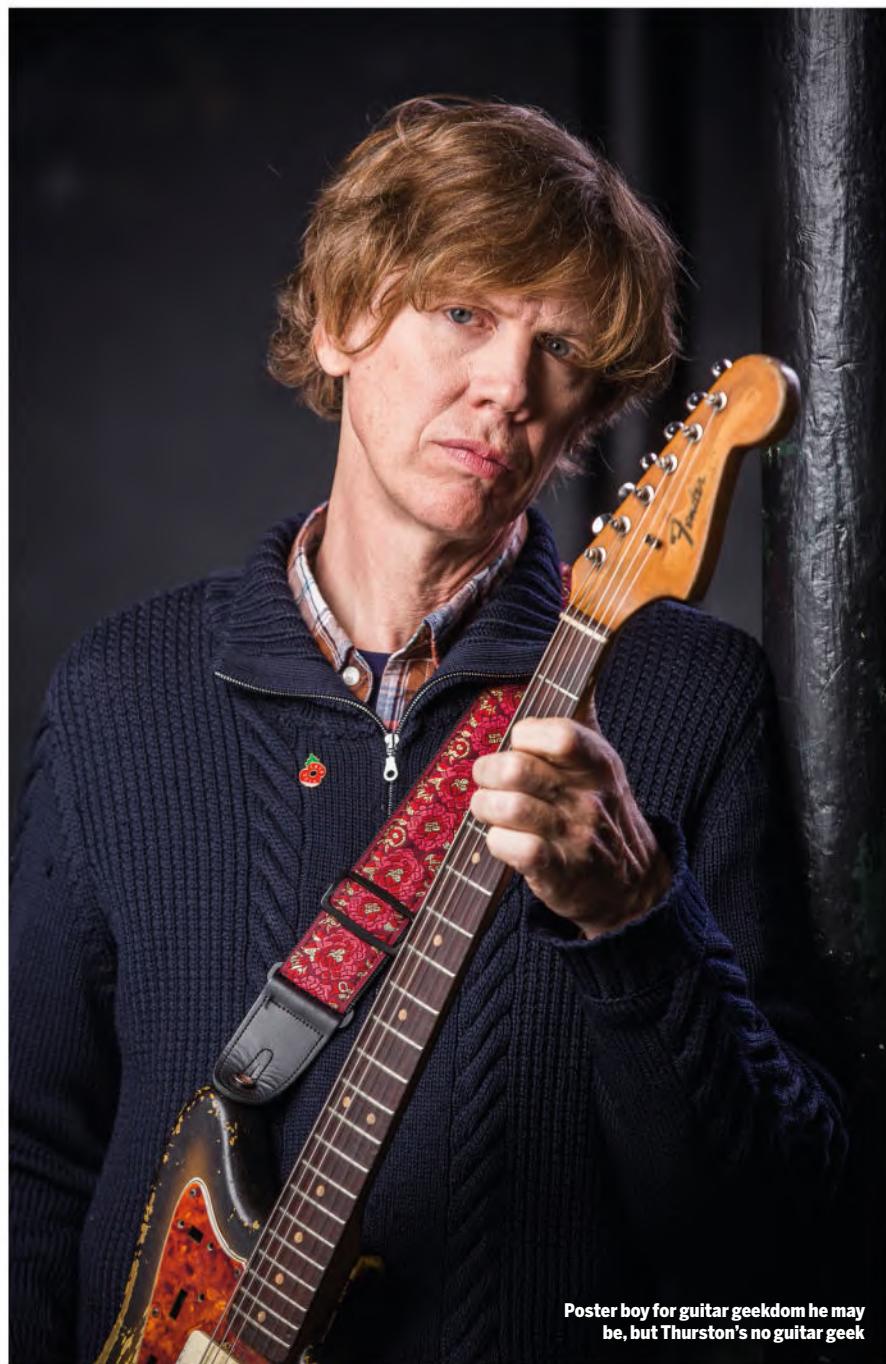
'58 Fender Jazzmaster

Sonic Youth resurrected Fender's forgotten creations in the name of guitar experimentation

Thurston Moore's experimental guitar exploits with Sonic Youth and in his solo career have influenced countless guitarists to mod their instruments, exploit different tunings and try to channel the howl of feedback for musical ends. "I've never really been a guitar geek!" he told *Guitarist*. "I realise that I've been sort of a poster boy for guitar geekdom to some degree... but I've never been a guitar geek myself."

Two guitar models in particular owe Thurston and his Sonic Youth guitar partner, Lee Ranaldo, a huge debt. For most of their career, the band used (and fearlessly modded) Fender Jazzmaster and Jaguars among other models, and this example is Moore's recent touring and recording squeeze. "That's a first series '58 Jazzmaster," he says of the battered but defiant guitar, which you can hear on Thurston's 2014 solo album, *The Best Day*. "It has a Mastery bridge and the Mastery vibrato unit. It's surprising how much you can use those [units] and not see your tuning go all over the place."





JAZZ MAN

Thurston Moore explains how he fell in love with the humble Fender Jazzmaster... "The Jazzmaster came into our world at some point in the mid-to-late 80s. I think we got one and we realised that it was a really good guitar, and they were somewhat affordable at that time. We found they were the most functional guitars for what we were doing and the behind the bridge action and the length were just kind of right... and for my height and build, I felt the body was just right, too. A lot of the guitars I used before were kind of small on my body. I'd see pictures of me playing and it just looked like this weird giant playing these little guitars! Modifications were necessary, though. At some point, we found that tune-o-matic bridges were better to use. Then we got rid of the electrics on the top because you kept hitting it while you were playing and it would turn into some other unwanted tone."

Poster boy for guitar geekdom he may be, but Thurston's no guitar geek

'61 Fender Jazzmaster

Almost 60 years on, Leo's jazz-orientated solidbody is finally enjoying its time in the sun

When Fender debuted the Jazzmaster at the 1958 NAMM Show, it was the company's new top-of-the-range electric, ahead of the Stratocaster. Designed to be a hit with the jazz market, it featured a comfortable 'offset waist contour body', a new vibrato system, mellower pickups and a tone circuit that allowed players to switch between preset rhythm and lead sounds. While jazz guitarists across the globe didn't unanimously hurl their archtops to the ground, stamp them into matchwood and rush to music shops to get a hold of this new solidbody design, it wasn't long before the Jazzmaster was embraced by the surf rock scene of the early 60s. Whether in the hands of Elvis Costello, Thurston Moore or J Mascis, it's remained an outsider choice in the decades since, but perhaps the tide has finally turned – 'Jazzmaster' was the most popular search term of 2014 on the huge Stateside buying and selling site, Reverb.com. This '61 example is a beauty, with a dark, strong natural voice, while the presence of a Buzz Stop (whizzobuzzstop.com) heightens string tension over the retrofitted Mustang bridge, increases sustain and makes for a more stable experience.





'62 Fender Jaguar

Fender's feature-packed surf oddity has endured to become a go-to choice for indie guitarists

January 1962 saw Fender assemble its first Jaguars, and by March of the same year the model began to roll off the production line in significant numbers. At \$379.50 in Sunburst, it was \$90 pricier than the Strat, and in keeping with its top-end status, the Jag bristled with features. The combination of a spring-loaded string mute, lead and rhythm circuits, a low-end filter nicknamed the 'strangle switch' and a 24-inch scale length made it a little fussy for many.

Despite the high-profile endorsement of Beach Boy Carl Wilson, sales quickly waned, though the patronage of legions of indie rockers in recent decades has served to rehabilitate the Jag's reputation.





BUILDING THE DREAM

Guitars: The Museum has the most astonishing guitar collection anywhere in the world – some of which are featured elsewhere in these pages. Twin brothers Samuel and Mikael Åhdén own the lot, so *Guitarist* flew to northern Sweden to meet them, shortly before the museum's 2014 grand opening

Words Mick Taylor **Photography** Joby Sessions

The rumble of V8 thunder falls silent as Mikael Åhdén kills the engine of his '64 Chevy Impala station wagon. Giddy on the automobile's effortless cool and excited at what's been promised, we shuffle off the giant bench seats and out into the warm Swedish summer sun to find Mike's twin brother, Samuel, fiddling with keys and alarms.

"You know, nobody has seen this: nobody," proffers Mikael as the door swings back. "It took us a week to unpack all the guitars!" he smirks, as we gasp our way around the first room of dreams. "We found 48 guitars we didn't even know we had," laughs Sam, continuing into a second room packed to bursting with yet more finery. In the final room, we wonder if we might be dreaming. Eyes dart fervently from headstock to headstock, wonder turning to disbelief as we spot a trio of astonishing

ES-335s: '58, '59, '60, right there, for real. There's a 1960 'Burst, of course, a '54 Strat, '50 Broadcaster, '51 Nocaster and – what? – '58 and '59 Flying Vs? '59 Jazzmaster, '59 White Falcon, a bewildering selection of P-Basses, Fire- and Thunderbirds to spare, more B-Bender guitars than we've ever seen and on and on it goes, every turn of the head delivering another rare gem.

"Is it normal to own 30 B-Bender guitars?" chuckles Sam. "I don't know if it is: it's a sickness. And sometimes you don't even remember what you have, so it will be great to get them all displayed properly."

'Properly' is why we're here. In a few short months, the twins' 40-plus-year collecting obsession will be taken from today's makeshift viewing gallery and put on public display at **Guitars: The Museum** in the northern Swedish city of Umeå. It's a hugely ambitious project, housed in an imposing refurbished building that will also be home to two restaurants, a live venue, guitar shop, exhibition space and a host of creative studios and meeting places.

Starting early

The brothers' guitar obsession started when they were boys. Samuel fondly remembers asking their mother for a magazine with The Beatles on the cover, only to be given one featuring that other famous British band. "When we came home, we found it was with The Rolling Stones," he smirks. "We were kind of disappointed, but there was a picture of Brian Jones with a Vox pear-shaped guitar and we thought he was just the coolest guy we ever saw. So we started to like The Rolling Stones – that was probably in 1965."

Their first guitars? "I really don't remember," says Mikael. "But we used to hang around with a classmate whose father had a black guitar. It turned out to be a 1956 Les Paul Custom. We could use it whenever we wanted, and that was the first step. Then I think Samuel bought a '65 ES-335, that was his first. I can't remember if I bought a Stratocaster..."

"It was an SG," interjects his brother. "Ah yeah, okay, an SG Standard with Bigsby," agrees Mikael as the memory returns. It's the kind of banter that continues throughout the day, and probably has done for the last 50-something years. As any guitar enthusiast knows, there's a big difference between owning a few instruments that you love, and becoming a 'serious' collector. Was there a point in history when the twins knew they'd made the jump?

"I had an old Gibson Melody Maker, and I was getting a Gibson ES-345," remembers Mikael. "I had to borrow money from my mother and father, and I promised to sell the other one as soon as I got the new one. I remember sitting and holding both and I realised that I couldn't sell either of them. That was the turning point for me."

Things quickly escalated. "I think it really started in 1980," adds Samuel. "When we



got in touch with a guy – we call him ‘The Greek’. His mother worked at SAS, the airline, so flew back and forwards to the USA. He’d go there and pick up 40 or so guitars [for us] with just a handshake, and when we sold them, we paid him. We’d keep 10 and sell 30. I mean they didn’t cost a lot of money then, in the early 1980s. Not like now!”

Since those days, the brothers have been buying and selling, trading up to the most desirable examples of pretty much every important guitar ever made. Neither is wealthy, and they both maintain ‘normal’ jobs to this day; Samuel is an archivist for the government, while Mikael works in a

music store. “I work selling instruments,” he laughs. “What a coincidence! But that way, you get connected with people who want to sell and trade.”

Making A Museum

Ask the brothers how many guitars they actually own, and they huddle quietly while murmuring in Swedish. “Should we say that?” asks Samuel of his brother.

“Well, since the museum is going to start, maybe it’s okay,” ponders Mikael. It illustrates how intensely personal this collection is, not to mention valuable and potentially vulnerable.

“Do we have to?” asks Samuel, smiling.

It’s the first question most people will ask, we reason. More discussion ensues. “We have around 270 to 300 guitars and basses,” he concedes, his smile broadening, “and around 150 old amps and speakers. We have old drum kits as well. We’re going to show it all off at the new guitar museum of course.”

Guitars: The Museum is an idea that’s been warming gently for a decade, and will mean the brothers’ incredible private collection will go on show for the public to see. “About 10 years ago, we had an exhibition in Stockholm and through that we got in

“You don’t want to lock them up and never play them. It’s a great joy to use them: they were made for that!”

touch with one of the guys in this project,” explains Mikael. “We talked a little bit loose about the thing, but then the pieces fell together; a music store, a rock club and a guitar collection. We found a perfect building for it, as well. So for the last two years, we’ve worked really hard.

“You could never do it on your own,” he continues, “so we got involved with the parliament here in Umeå and they were thrilled when we presented the plan. Umeå is the European Cultural Capital in 2014, so it was great for them to have something to show the rest of Europe, so to speak.”

How will the guitars be displayed? “The building was built in 1917, so there are many things that need to be changed,” explains Mikael. “They will be behind glass,” adds Samuel, “and there’s a ventilation system to get the right temperature and moisture level. Also, it has to be secure so nobody can touch the guitars, but it also has to look good: it wasn’t easy!”

The brothers go on to explain how the Guitars: The Museum building will also be

ROUND THE BEND

One B-Bender guitar in a collection is unusual – yet Samuel Åhdén has around 30... “We heard The Byrds with Clarence White on the B-Bender and we got hooked on that,” remembers Samuel. “We couldn’t understand how he played but we read it was a B-Bender mechanism. So we wrote to Gene Parsons and he made us a couple: one was a Les Paul Junior 1955, with the B-Bender.”

“Dave Edmunds’ Rockpile was our favourite band,” adds Mikael. “Albert Lee was playing on *Sweet Little Lisa* and he just kept on pushing the shoulder, it was a B-Bender guitar!” So which are the brothers’ most important B-Benders? “We have one of the earliest Clarence White B-Benders, which has the original receipt from Gene Parsons when he made the installation,” says Samuel. “There’s the ‘55 Les Paul, and some Zemaitis-types as well. Oh, and a 1951 Nocaster – that one has a double bender! And a 1954 Tele also...”

“Completely insane,” laughs Sam.





CRAZY 'BOUT AN AUTOMOBILE

Guitarist was delighted to be picked up in a stunning 60s Chevrolet El Camino on our first night in Umeå. The following morning, we were greeted with a GMC van and a 1964 Chevy Impala. What gives?

"Our grandfather was a taxi driver and he only had American cars," explains Samuel. "We grew up at his place, and we just thought that was the car to have."

"It's really the same language as vintage guitars – the cool designs," adds his brother, "and they were car colours of course – the custom colours that they used on Fenders and Gibsons."

"It really has to do with design," concurs Samuel. "Y'know, Ray Dietrich was a car designer and he designed the Firebirds and Thunderbirds..."

"Our friend who fixes all the cars at his auto shop, he drives our van," explains Mikael. "His name is Stig. We call him The Stig, like *Top Gear*!"

home to two exhibitions on how traditional Gibson and Fender guitars are made, as well as housing modern rehearsal facilities, a music store, Pawn Shop, restaurants and even a quality live music venue, Scharinska. It's designed as a multi-purpose destination

for musicians, tourists and other intrigued parties for sure, but the headline draw is, of course, ultimately the guitars – the Holy Grails.

"We'll have a Crown Jewels room for the [1960] Les Paul, the [58 and '59] Flying Vs, the [1958, '59, '60 ES-335] dot-markers," confirms Mikael, telling us what we want to hear. "In that room, it will be maybe only 10 pieces, in another room maybe 70 or 80 guitars: so you have a different impression when you walk through the museum."

Pick A Fave

For most guitar players, the thought of owning many hundreds of instruments is as bewildering as it is attractive. Imagine for a second that you have one for every day of the year, near as dammit. Could you possibly have a favourite?

"Mine is the 1958 blonde dot-marker [ES-335]," says Mikael without hesitation. "Ever since I first saw Dave Edmunds playing his guitar, I really wanted that one."

"Mine is a B-Bender, of course," laughs Samuel, a fully paid-up devotee of the twangtastic Parsons-White contraption (see Round The Bend, p78). "It's in a rebuilt '54 Telecaster – a fantastic guitar, completely destroyed in value, but it's an amazing instrument to play."

"Is that your only favourite?" asks Mikael. "No, a couple of hundred other B-Benders..." says Samuel, laughing. "Some guitars are beautiful to look at, and others are players. Some are both!"

Presumably, the really valuable stuff is too scary to play these days? "When we're playing in our band, we use some of the



Imagine for a second that you have one guitar for every day of the year, near as dammit. Could you possibly have a favourite?

favourite guitars," Mikael says. "You need to be careful, but you don't want to lock them up and never play on them. It's a great joy to use them – they were made for that!"

Despite the brothers' generally relaxed attitude to their treasure trove of artefacts, there is a darker side to the vintage guitar market. So what about fakes – have they ever been caught out? "We've never got any fakes," says Samuel, relaxed.

"But nowadays, you can build a replica of a Nocaster or a Broadcaster or a Les Paul," Mikael says, "so today, it's almost impossible to buy a sunburst [1958 to '60] Les Paul. I wouldn't do it."

"Unless you know the history of the guitar..." reasons his brother.

"Yeah. That's the sad thing about vintage guitars. It's all about money these days. Before, you bought the guitar because you just thought that it was a good instrument. That joy is not there any more, which is sad."

"You do hear stories about somebody who has paid a lot of dollars for a sunburst Les Paul, and it turns out to be a converted '52 or something," continues Mikael. "Many old Goldtops got refinished, which ruins the

original guitar, but they're more expensive as the converted guitar than as the original."

What's Left?

As we get ready to have a closer look at some more of the guitars, Samuel and Mikael are also limbering up to play for us, to make the music beneath the filming session that we're also doing today. Before we wrap up the talking, is there anything they're still searching for? "Absolutely: a 1958 Explorer would be top of the line," replies Mikael immediately. "If anybody would like to give us that guitar, we'd be very pleased!"

"Or the money so we can buy it," laughs Samuel. Anything else? "Of course, there are always many guitars," says Mikael. "But [the Explorer is] the missing piece. A good guitar is a good guitar, but that item would close the case!" **G**

Guitars: The Museum is situated in the Swedish city of Umeå, 50 minutes from Stockholm. Alongside the collection of guitars, the building houses a nightclub, restaurant, bar and music store

www.guitarsthemuseum.com



GRETSCH

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GENTLEMAN



GORGEOUS GRETSCHES

If Fenders and Gibsons are just too stately for your tastes, then check out this pack of rock 'n' roll rebels with their effortless, outsider 50s American cool. From rodeo-themed Roundups and Country Rocs to retrofuturistic Silver Jets and Country Gentlemen – not to mention the irresistible charms of the White Falcon – it's time to fall in love with Gretsch all over again

Gretsch White Falcon

Intended as a showpiece, not a production model, the White Falcon is the last word in guitar luxury

In 1954, screen siren Marilyn Monroe's skirt may have been fluttering salaciously in the updraft from a New York subway grating, but for US guitar players, it was a very different, yet equally voluptuous blonde that was infiltrating their dreams. Initially intended as a purely promotional item, the Gretsch 6136 White Falcon caught the eye at the NAMM trade show to such an extent that the company put it into production the following year.

Heralded as one of Gretsch's 'Guitars Of The Future', the hollowbody White Falcon was, is and always will be an expensive luxury item. Its (now) retrofuturistic allure is based on the automotive stylings of the 50s era down to its 'Cadillac G' tailpiece, and despite its large 17-inch lower bout, its popularity has endured despite the ineluctable trend towards smaller and more manageable instruments. This one, at Guitars: The Museum, sports a pair of Filter'Tron humbucking pickups, introduced in 1958.





'60 Gretsch 6118 Double Anniversary

This 75th anniversary model was a fairly affordable guitar. Here's one with a difference (or two)

Back in 1959, Gretsch was celebrating its 75th anniversary, but rather than issue a high-end creation to commemorate the occasion, it unveiled the affordable Anniversary model, which came in one- and two-pickup configurations. This example is the 6118, known as the Double Anniversary thanks to its Patent Applied For Filter'Tron humbuckers, which were replaced by HiLo'Tron single coils in 1961. The 6118 came in a desirable Two-Tone Smoke Green (inspired by Cadillacs from that era), and carried a luxurious 'Anniversary Model' nameplate on the headstock. The model's unbound ebony fingerboard and minimal control layout were basic compared with other models, but this guitar's previous owner made a few upgrades, replacing the G-cutout tailpiece with a Bigsby, while the presence of one selector switch and five knobs – as opposed to dual selectors and three knobs – makes us wonder if internal alterations took place, too. Along with the clear replacement pickguard, this guitar's other idiosyncrasy is the sticker near the base of the body – while this example won't win points for period-correctness, there's no denying the sheer cool emanating from those f-holes.





'65 Gretsch G6120 Chet Atkins

This hollowbody sounds great through a Marshall, according to its owner, James Dean Bradfield

Manic Street Preachers' frontman James Dean Bradfield is a true gear lover, and typically takes 15 guitars with him on a full tour to take care of different tunings and, we suspect, just because he can. He's most linked in fans' minds to the white 1990 Gibson Les Paul Custom that's been on every album throughout the Manics' stellar career; but when *Guitarist* interviewed him recently in his 'Faster' Studio in Cardiff, he showed us some other gems from his guitar collection – including this beautiful 1965 Country Gentleman.

"It was bought from Fat Rick's Guitar Emporium just before *Everything Must Go*," Bradfield told us. "I used a Vox AC30 a bit more on that album and this Gretsch, and it really helped what I was trying to achieve, guitar-wise. It's also all over *This Is My Truth...* and *Journal For Plague Lovers*. It's the guitar on *Your Love Alone Is Not Enough*. But on that track it's this Gretsch through a Marshall JCM900 linked up with a Diezel VH4. I was surprised how a hollowbody like this could sound so powerful, yet still have such a lovely colour-range across the strings."

"A lot of people seem to play Gretsches through quite boutique-y amplifiers, but they sound great through Marshalls or a Diezel, believe me. It's a star-spangled sound."

'55 Gretsch Round-up

Gretsch rustled up something special with this high-end DeArmond-toting gunslinger

As corny as it looks by modern standards, the cows, steers and cactii that make up this 1955 Round-up's Western iconography was in keeping with many products of the day in the US. Designed to appeal to players in the burgeoning country and western scene, the single-cut Round-up was a high-end product in Gretsch's four-strong Jet line, and came loaded with a pair of DeArmond pickups for the requisite twang. It wandered off into the sunset in the late-1950s; if you want to lasso one yourself today, expect to pay a considerable sum for an immaculate specimen.



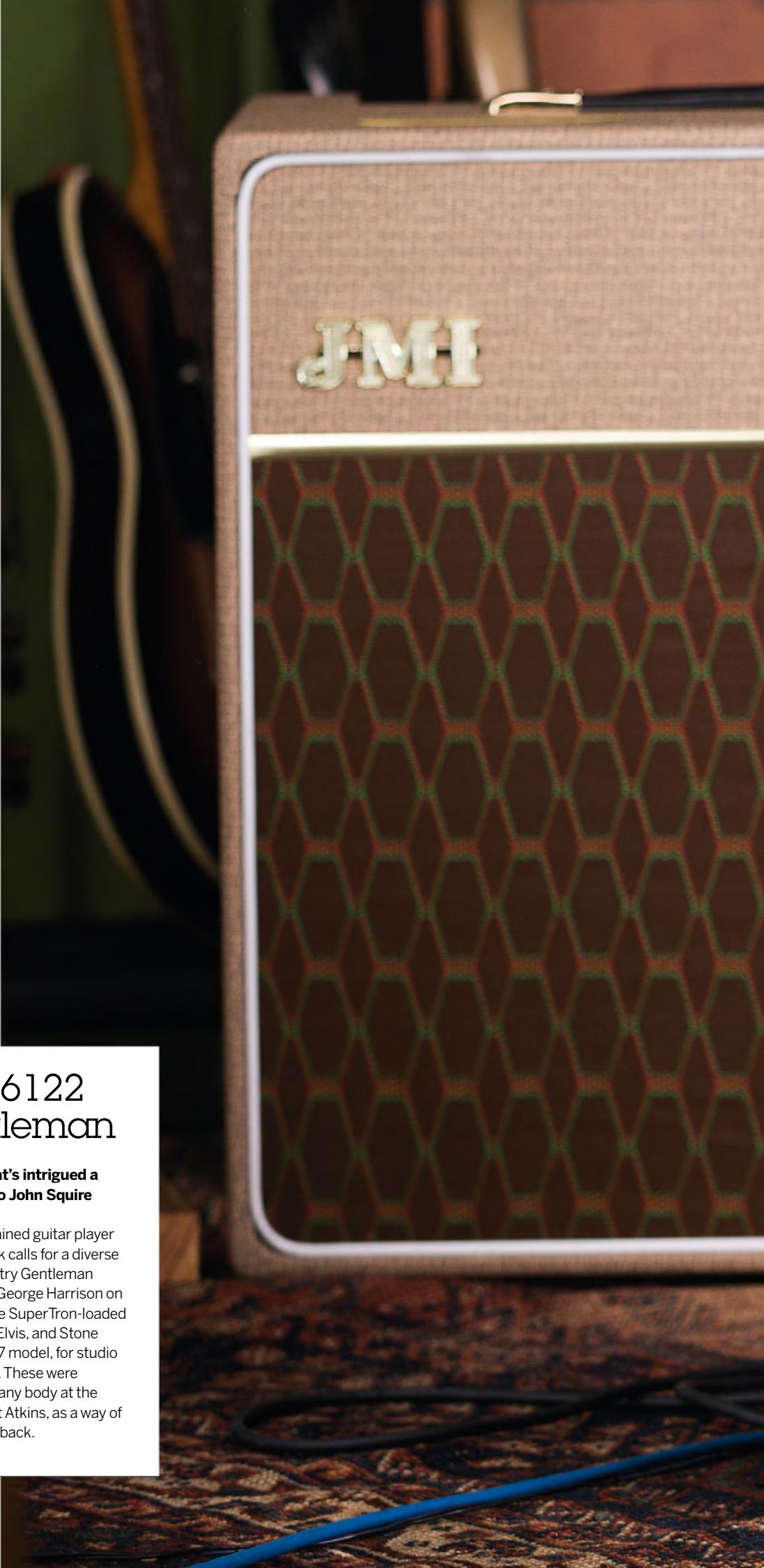


'74 Gretsch G7620 Country Roc

Gretsch looked to its past and revived its Wild West appointments for this nostalgic model from 1974

In the late-60s and early-70s, guitarists were beginning to feel disgruntled with their lot. Many felt the current production models of the day were inferior to guitars of the 50s and early 60s – partly owing to widely criticised buyouts of Fender by CBS and Gretsch by Baldwin – and this spearheaded what we now know as the vintage guitar movement. Gretsch picked up on the trend, introducing a number of new models with a distinct Western theme that evoked the Round Up models of the 50s, starting with the Roc Jet in 1969, then the Country Roc in 1974.

This 1974 Country Roc shows that Gretsch certainly went all out in re-embracing cowboy culture. Visual appointments include a 'G' brand on the top of the semi-solid body, studded leather around the sides of the guitar, a 'G'-cutout tailpiece with belt buckle, and even horseshoes on the bound ebony fingerboard's inlays and headstock. Pickups, meanwhile, were Super'Tron humbuckers, which were a little hotter than Gretsch's usual Filter'Trons. The Country Roc was only around for seven years, with production ceasing in 1979, but its introduction is significant, highlighting the growing feeling of nostalgia for the electric guitar's 'golden era' – something that has only escalated in the years since, as we'll attest!



1967 **Gretsch** 6122 Country Gentleman

A late-60s Country Gentleman that's intrigued a succession of players, from Elvis to John Squire

Portishead's Adrian Utley is a jazz-trained guitar player and ambitious composer whose work calls for a diverse sonic palette. His 1967 Gretsch Country Gentleman (similar in spec to the one played by George Harrison on *The Ed Sullivan Show* in 1962, and the SuperTron-loaded variant once favoured for live use by Elvis, and Stone Roses' guitarist John Squire) is a 1967 model, for studio use only; note the painted-on f-holes. These were incorporated onto the bound mahogany body at the request of the guitar's endorser, Chet Atkins, as a way of increasing sustain and reducing feedback.



'58 Gretsch 6129 Silver Jet

A sparkling gem that'd be the star of any stage, this Silver Jet is a vintage dream machine

There are cool guitars, and there are cool guitars. And then there's the Gretsch 6129. Introduced in 1954 as a variation on the 6128 Duo Jet, the Silver Jet sported a silver sparkle top derived from the plastic wrap that the company also used as a drum shell finish. Despite solidbody appearances, the instruments featured chambered two-inch deep mahogany bodies, while other specifications evolved rapidly throughout the first few years of production. This example, shot while on sale at Vintage And Rare Guitars in Bath, likely dates from the first half of 1958. It sports the thumbnail fretboard inlays introduced early that year, but not the Filter'Tron pickups that later became standard issue. As you might expect with any 56-year-old instrument, this Silver Jet requires a little fettling to keep in tune, but the sound from those DeArmond Dynasonic single coils is truly monstrous; a twangsome thing of wonder and a killer rock 'n' roll machine.



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SEVENTH HEAVEN

The ideal instruments to play classic covers on? How about rare vintage guitars that span 70 years of rock...

Words Matt Frost

Standing strong in London's East End since the mid 1800s, Wilton's Music Hall is the world's oldest surviving grand music hall – a building that oozes musical history from its very foundations. And this year, it's home to a prestigious collection of some of the rarest guitars known to man, as it plays host to *Seven Decades*, a hugely impressive two-hour live music spectacular.

The show is the brainchild of guitar-adoring best friends Phil Hylander and Michael Ross. Combining stunning video projections and voiceover from Fun Lovin' Criminal Huey Morgan with a top notch rock 'n' roll band, *Seven Decades* charts the history of the humble electric guitar from the 1950s right up to the present day. Ultra-rare vintage Fender Stratocasters and Telecasters, Gibson ES-335s and Les Pauls all take centre stage, as they bring the music of the last seven decades to life.

While Michael and Phil co-wrote and directed *Seven Decades* together, it's talented guitarist Mike who fronts the live band and chucks out fiery virtuosic versions of guitar classics from every conceivable genre – Elmore James to The Police, Led Zeppelin to the Sex Pistols. *Guitarist* meets the men behind the music to find out how the show came together and how this

collection of gorgeous instruments arrived on the stage.

What inspired you to put the *Seven Decades* show together in the first place?

Phil Hylander: "Well, Mike and I had been building up this really amazing collection of guitars and we always used to get really frustrated about, 'How do you make the most of this superb collection of guitars?' It's so unrewarding having them on a wall somewhere because they shouldn't just be static pieces of art. We started to write the show three years ago as a working exhibition of guitars and, of course, we have this obsession with these four guitars in particular [Fender Stratocasters, Fender Telecasters, Gibson ES-335s and Gibson Les Pauls]. So, the show has partly been driven by the guitars we love, but then also by the music we love as well. It has a really beautiful appeal because it's about the history of an instrument that 70 years ago was created in a certain way and looked a certain way and, 70 years later, we still play with pretty much identical aesthetics."

Do you two own all the beautiful guitars that are featured in the show?

PH: "Mike and I own the bulk of the instruments in the show, but then we have two other really good friends that also

contribute to the collection, which includes some of the Stratocasters."

Michael Ross: "It's a chance for collectors to actually hear their guitars cranked up through a '59 Plexi head, which is like a dream for a lot of them!"

PH: "There's a real culture with classic cars of collectors having professional drivers to race them. That similar approach hasn't really ever existed with guitar collections."

And how did you come up with the format for the show?

MR: "With the show, we didn't just want to be delivering it as, 'Oh, this is this guitar and this is another guitar...' We wanted to play them for real and make it emotional and make it really mean something, so the guitars are coming alive. They've all got stories to tell. If you pick up a guitar from 1954, it's got a big history and that has got to come out."

PH: "We thought that the right format was this kind of hybrid between the musical concept and a documentary with historic images and a beautiful abstract light show. That means you're telling a proper story with proper words and proper archive footage. We wanted to make sure that the links between songs were informative and interesting and educational, but they also had to look pretty. That was quite a task."



It must have also been a challenge to choose the tracks...

MR: "I think it was quite easy to decide on the artists, but then to pick the actual tracks was more of a challenge because we had to balance the songs we love and want to play with songs that we know the audience wants to hear. Sometimes, we did want to get a little deeper with it. We do a Roy Buchanan song and a lot of people who aren't guitar heads won't know anything about Roy Buchanan. We do *Sweet Dreams* and people come back to us afterwards and ask, 'What was that song? That was really beautiful! It's lovely to help reinvigorate interest in an artist like him, where he's largely been forgotten. That's really a buzz, you know."

"Another thing is that we can recycle the whole show by just having a whole different set list of songs and that's a great thing, too. Like with Hendrix, we're currently playing *Purple Haze* and *Little Wing*, but we could be playing *Freedom* by him instead."

PH: "Yeah, Mike and I basically have 50 per cent more songs and visuals prepared, so on three different nights, the show could be completely different."

MR: "We could probably do the Strat all night if we wanted – 'Seven Decades Of The Single-Coil Pickup'!"

PH: "Or 'Seven Decades Of Out Of Phase'!"

How far did the guitars tend to pick themselves for a particular track?

PH: "Well, you begin by knowing that you've got to cover the decades and respect each one. Then, you have an idea of a setlist and then that setlist informs the right guitar choices. It all tends to solve itself in that process. There's always a right song for each guitar but – just to be clear – the guitar choice isn't designed to match the year of the song. It matches the guitar the player would have used on that song."

MR: "With Red Hot Chili Peppers, for example, John Frusciante played *Under The Bridge* on a '56 Strat, so we've got a '56 Strat."

Have you managed to match all the guitars all the way through the set?

PH: "Bar one or two guitars, I think we've matched everything."

MR: "We do The Shadows on a '61 Fiesta Red because there are very few '59 Fiesta Reds around."

PH: "But we will buy one of those one day – that would be perfect! Then Mike plays David Bowie on a '68 black Les Paul but Mick Ronson would have stripped it back to wood. We haven't done that because we prefer it in black."

Tonally, do you find every vintage guitar has its own unique sound and feel?

MR: "Hugely! If they're right and if they're

1 Classic guitars need some classic amps to play through – not least an original 1959 Marshall Plexi head

2 Where it all started – an original '52 Tele, used to play *Gimme Shelter* in the show

3 This gorgeous '55 Goldtop "just makes the hairs on the back of your neck stand on end!" says Michael

4 Michael says of the stunning '59 Les Paul: "It's the most treasured asset of the whole collection. It just sounds killer. It's absolutely mint and as clean as you could ever believe. It's the most beautiful Les Paul I've ever played"

5 This '57 Strat isn't your average guitar, as Michael explains: "This one is one of the rarest we have. It's a 'Mary Kaye' with the gold hardware and it's nicely worn. Even though Gilmour didn't play one, I use it for *Shine On You Crazy Diamond* because it's just got the best clean sound"

6 This '61 Strat is used for *Apache* and *Miserlou*, and Michael's a fan. "This is like Eric Johnson's, and Jesus Christ it's an amazing guitar! It's hard to explain what it gives you but it's got great tone..."

7 This stunning Surf Green Strat is a 1967 model, and is appropriately used to play *Purple Haze* and *Little Wing* in the show

8 This original 1954 Strat is in good nick for a guitar of its age, but it's showing some wear on the Bakelite pickup covers. It's used to play Buddy Holly's *Brown Eyed Handsome Man* in the show





9 This Sunburst '63 Telecaster is used to play The Police track *So Lonely*

10 This '57 Goldtop is notable as being the first year the Les Paul swapped the P-90s for humbuckers.

"Humbuckers on a Les Paul – it's just a match made in heaven, isn't it?" Michael enthuses. "It's a great guitar and has almost a sort of Allman Brothers vibe to it. This is one of the guitars I play for the encore on *While My Guitar Gently Weeps*"

11 This '64 ES-335 is one of two used in the show, used to play Eric Johnson's *Cliffs Of Dover*, among several others. "This is my favourite 335. I love it!" Michael enthuses. "It's had a refret and there are a couple of things that aren't quite original on it, but it's a player's guitar – the

real deal! You pick it up and, bang, you're in!"

12 This '63 Casino is an unusual Iced Tea hue, and that's not all: "It's 100 per cent original and in immaculate condition," says Michael. "It's exactly the same as Dave Davies had and a lot of those guys from that era played them. It's beautiful for *You Really Got Me*, but it's not beautiful for everything. It's beautiful for what it does"



11



12

good, they just sound amazing. They all have their own personality so they're all very different. You can feel when you're playing an alder body compared to an ash body. It can all depend on the quality of the build, the type and age of the wood, and the quality of the pickups and the way they're hand-wound. As with any quality instrument, they get better over time, just like a great violin or a great piano."

Playing around 20 different classic guitars across 40-plus stylistically diverse tracks must be an incredible challenge...

MR: "From a technical point of view, it's the most unnatural ground to be in, because you're taking 25 guitars and you're going up there and having to play them like you really mean it on every one! We all have our favourite guitars. I mean, we've got a '57 Goldtop, which is a stunning guitar, but personally I could just play the '57 Strat all day long!"

"This show is like dodging bullets every second because you've got guitars coming at you all the time. The transitions can be hard work, but our crew have just come off tour with Foo Fighters. You can trust these guys and they do a great job passing me the guitars and looking after them all. Also, no matter how much you rehearse for it all, these guitars have different output levels and, technically, you've got to be able to

handle all of that. It is literally like crossing no man's land and then you've actually got to arrive at something that is presentable!"

"When we were writing the 335 section, we got to a certain point and we were like, 'We're going to have to play *Cliffs Of Dover* by Eric Johnson...' and the thought of that was daunting, in terms of delivering it on a guitar that you don't expect it to be on. But that is the story and that's why you've got to do it."

Mike, is there a song in the set that you find the most difficult to play?

MR: "The hardest one for me is *Heaven Knows I'm Miserable [Now]* by Johnny Marr [The Smiths]. It beats me up every time. It kills me."

PH: "But then you didn't grow up listening to The Smiths like I did..."

MR: "You say, 'Can you stop playing it like Nile Rodgers?'"

PH: "Yeah, I have said, 'It's not meant to be that funky!'"

How much improvisation is there during the show?

MR: "It's all about that, because if there's no improvisation, what's the point? None of the songs you're hearing were played the same live as they were in the studio by all these artists. With *Whole Lotta Love* – listen to the recorded version and then

listen to Zep do it live. It's all over the place, it's mental and that's what it's all about!"

PH: "The show is meant to be quite edgy. Any live band performance is meant to be edgy and that's where this differs from a pure West End kind of show."

Where are you aiming to take Seven Decades in the future?

PH: "We think that this nexus between the history of the guitar and the history of music, and the incredible sustainability of this design and this invention has really, really big appeal beyond just guitar players and guitar fans."

MR: "We've played here [at Wilton's Music Hall] seven times and pretty much sold it out seven times and the audience reaction has been really encouraging. We've had children coming to see it right the way through to 70 year olds. It's an education for many people."

PH: "We think this show really lends itself to big theatres, but theatres where people will take the time to listen to the story as well as just the music, places like the Royal Albert Hall and Carnegie Hall... big venues that have a kind of legacy of respect for what's happening onstage. That really makes sense to us." **G**

For more info on Seven Decades, check out www.sevendecades.com

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MINIATURE
ACOUSTIC



CLASSIC & VINTAGE GUITARS

AWESOME AMERICANA

Outside of Gibson, Fender and Gretsch, the US of A has produced an endless succession of great guitar makers. We've gathered together a beguiling line-up of classics, mongrels and oddities from these less orthodox names, whose instruments are still lusted after by collectors and players alike

'63 Harmony H75

A classic example of the US mail-order guitars now spiralling in value on the vintage market

At its peak, Harmony was the largest musical instrument manufacturer in the USA. Founded by Wilhelm Schultz in 1892, it was later, under the ownership of Sears, Roebuck & Company, that the marque's appeal mushroomed as it made hay from Roy Smeck signature models, despite the backdrop of the Great Depression. 350,000 Harmony instruments with various brand names were sold between 1964 and '65 and the guitar pictured, armed with a trio of DeArmond 'Gold Foil' pickups, is typical of that era, though its original Sunburst finish has been stripped.

Dan Auerbach's use of the Bigsby-equipped version, the H78, has played no small part in transforming Harmony guitars of the period from forgotten pawn shop curios into sought-after cult classics for those of a dirty garage blues and indie persuasion. This particular instrument resided until recently at Vintage & Rare Guitars in Bath, but if you can't find a vintage example there's always Eastwood's Airline-branded tribute model. Gold Foil single coils are also enjoying something of a renaissance, with pickup gurus such as Jason Lollar in the US and Mojo Pickups in the UK making great-sounding aftermarket replicas of vintage Teisco units. None-more-boutique Texan maker Collings even had a Gold Foil-loaded guitar on its stand at the NAMM show...





Harmony H54 Rocket

Adrian Utley is just one great player who's found a modern-day use for the super-thinline Rocket

Harmony's 1959 Rocket was a 20-fret student hollowbody that achieved widespread popularity through stylish looks, quality pickups and a keen price. There were three ultra-thinline Rockets in the range; the single-pickup H53, the dual 'Golden Tone' pickup H54 and the H59, loaded with three DeArmond 'Gold Tone Indox' pickups. Later variants on the H59 had creative approaches to control layout, with as many as six dials in a row, plus a rotary switch, competing for their player's attention on stage. This twin-pickup H54 Rocket is often used live by its owner, Adrian Utley of Portishead.

'57 Epiphone Zephyr De Luxe Regent

A heavenly hollowbody from the jazz era with luxury appointments and twin humbuckers

Gibson didn't have the monopoly on cool hollowbody electrics in the 50s, as this royally appointed Epiphone attests. Despite its '57 pedigree, the jazz-era stylings, such as the elegant 'Frequensator' tailpiece, hark back to the earliest versions of the model, which was introduced in 1948. In fact, the De Luxe Regent – sold as the Deluxe Electric in its latter years – was discontinued the year after this model, equipped with two New York mini-humbuckers, was made. During the model's lifespan, the body width grew from 17.75 to 18.5 inches in some mid-50s examples. This particular Zephyr, shot while residing at Vintage & Rare guitars, Bath, sports a blonde finish on its laminated spruce top, but the model was also available in a Sunburst. What's it like to play? Well, of course, it's a breeze...





Silvertone Bobkat

Learner instruments like this Bobkat have become retro classics prized by today's players

In the 1960s in the US, Harmony made guitars for a number of retailers – hence a model ordered from Sears' catalogue would be branded as a Silvertone, and a model branded Airline would be sold by Wards, and so on. LOTS were subsequently sold to those budding guitar-mad baby-boomers-on-a-budget, and the resurgence in popularity of these instruments thanks to the muscular-toned retro riffery of Jack White and Dan Auerbach et al has ensured that their price on the vintage market has remained relatively inflated, considering their everyman origins. This diminutive Silvertone Bobkat has DeArmond 'diamond-grille' gold-foil pickups and displays a clear tip of the hat to Fender in its contoured outline. Adrian Utley of Portishead bought this particular one for its "savage" tone.





Buscarino Corey Christiansen Model Archtop

A modern masterpiece of an archtop that marries progressive thinking with time-honoured luthiery

This breathtaking modern creation was born from the collaboration of two talents at the very top of their game. It was crafted by North Carolina-based luthier John Buscarino for US jazz picker, Corey Christiansen, and combines a number intelligent modern tweaks to the classic archtop formula.

As you'd expect from a man who learned guitar-making craft from classical guitar master-builder Augustino LoPrinzi and archtop maker Robert Benedetto, it's an exquisite instrument, featuring a solid carved, aged Sitka spruce top married to carved Big Leaf flamed maple back and sides; it incorporates a feedback-suppressing block inside the body, and has an Alnico III pickup wound by Kent Armstrong.

Want to see it in the flesh? Go to Ivor Mairants Musicentre in London, where it resides in a plush case with a built-in humidification system. Want to own it? That'll be £7,499...





'61 Martin F-55

A rare 1960s Martin electric model that harks back to the company's earlier jazz archtops

Martin's maple-topped F-55, produced between 1961 and 1965, was the company's first single-cut electric model, which borrows elements of its classy aesthetic from Martin's 1930 archtops. This 1961 specimen belongs to US singer-songwriter and vintage-guitar aficionado Jackson Browne, who told us: "It's my new favourite guitar! It has these DeArmond pickups. A lot of Gretsch guitars have these pickups. They sound really great. It's a hollowbody guitar, and very much like the 00-17 in the neck. It's got the same headstock as my other Martins. It's just beautiful: beautiful, in-tune, ringing. It's great for fingerpicking, or anything, really."





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Eddie Van Halen Frankenstein Replica

A mindblowingly accurate contemporary recreation of one of rock's most iconic one-off guitars

Back in 2007, Fender's Custom Shop launched a 300-only run of one of its most ambitious creations ever – a breathtakingly faithful replica of Eddie Van Halen's beloved bitsa, nicknamed 'Frankenstein'. The pricetag of \$32,000USD (circa £16,000) was, admittedly, a stumbling block for some players, to say the least. But when *Guitarist* got its trembling paws on one to inspect, we played it, caressed it and just sat staring at it in awe, wondering how it was possible to recreate something so unique, so faithfully.

Of course, the original – like Frankenstein's monster, the product of hours of frenzied experimentation with guitar parts lying around Wayne Charvel's San Dimas repair shop – wasn't put together with anything like as much care.

"You know, I bought a body from them for 50 bucks and a neck for 80 bucks, slapped it together, put an old Gibson pickup in it, and it's my main

guitar," shrugged Ed at the time. "Painted it up, you know, with stripes and stuff. I guess that's my thing."

But for Fender's Custom Shop team, reproducing it to the last fibre became an obsessively vintage-correct labour of love. From finding the correct materials to matching the finish to painstakingly sourcing the precise make of cycle reflector that Eddie absent-mindedly stuck to the guitar's back, the Frankenstein Replica is – for all intents and purposes – an identical guitar to the one it's based on.

Considering the rich history of the original, the significance of both Van Halen's music and Ed's stunning technique, plus the frankly amazing level of detail that had clearly gone into the manufacture of each example, we concluded (as we reluctantly handed it back) that the guitar blurred the line between a practical instrument as we know it and a work of art.

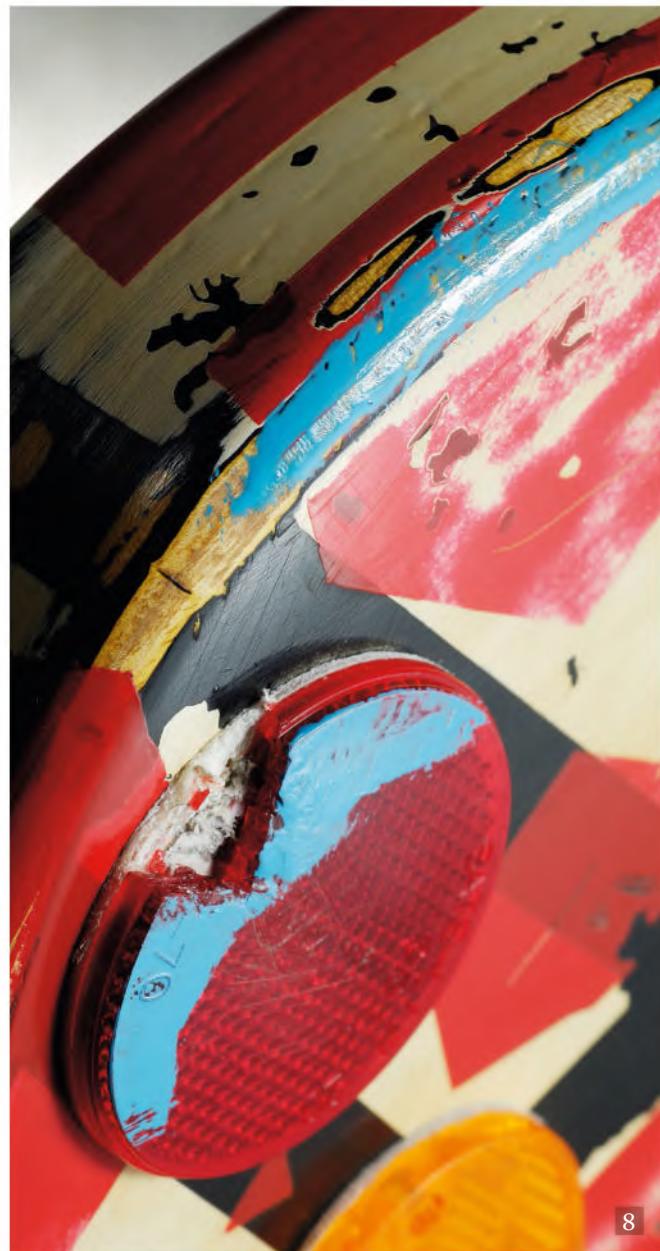
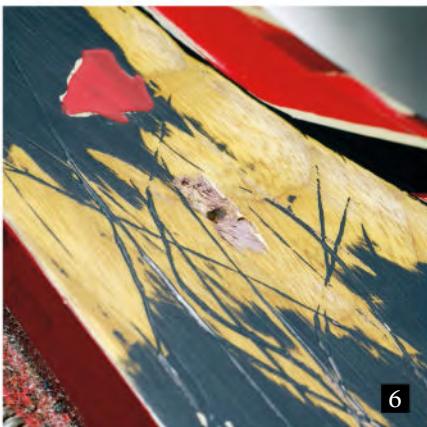


KRAMER VERSUS KRAMER

How to spot the real Frankenstein...

Although Eddie has changed the neck fixed to the original body many times, it's still easy to spot the Frankenstein. It's the only guitar that Ed's regularly seen with that has that portion of a black scratchplate, rusted old

humbucker and severely well-worn Floyd Rose bridge. Aficionados of Van Halen's classic *Live Without A Net* video and DVD will no doubt be reaching for the phone as they read this, but we can confirm that the guitar he used for that and other dates on 1986's 5150 world tour (as well as most of 1984's eponymous trek) was, in fact, a 100 per cent Kramer affair. Van Halen put the guitar together himself at Kramer's New Jersey HQ, using parts from a Pacer and Baretta, and sprayed it up in his usual effervescent manner using Krylon 'rattlecan' paint and Space Tape reflective stripes: he even made the humbucker himself.



"I bought a body from Wayne Charvel for 50 bucks and a neck for 80 bucks, slapped it together, put an old Gibson pickup in it, and it's my main guitar"

- EVH -





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1. The maple neck and huge frets have been perfectly worn
2. A 1971 quarter was used to keep the original vibrato stable
3. Believe it or not, this socket was made less than a year ago
4. Six Schaller machineheads keep everything in tune
5. For Ed, volume is tone, hence this perfectly aged knob
6. Each and every scratch and dink has been recreated
7. How Ed wished for a locking nut back in 1977...
8. The most difficult part of the Replica's birth was sourcing these cycle reflectors on the Replica's rear
9. Screw-eye strap holders and some more wear and tear
10. Ed used a chisel to increase the routing for a humbucker, hence the less-than-perfect cavity

'62 Dwight double-cut

This example of a rare special-order brand crosses the Epiphone Coronet with the Les Paul Junior

Gibson's wildly successful Les Paul Junior inspired many variants, and here's one such rare vintage 1960s example. The 1962 Dwight double-cut is one of only 75 guitars to bear the marque. They were made by Gibson for a US retailer, and were based on the Epiphone SB533 Coronet. Ultra-lightweight, with a single P-90, it's a stunning offshoot of the Junior design philosophy. This one is owned by XTC guitarist, Dave Gregory.

"I remember seeing Steve Marriott in Humble Pie with a little Dwight," Gregory explains. "I'd never seen one before. I learned later that they were a special order by this guy in St Louis, who had a shop called Sonny [Shields] Music."



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HOW TO BUY & SELL A VINTAGE GUITAR

To ensure a successful outcome, buying or selling a vintage instrument needs to be done with a great deal of care, work and know-how, much more so than when dealing with a six-string that's merely second-hand. The vintage market places far greater importance on certain aspects that radically affect value and, all-too-often, these can cause the biggest problems...

Words Paul Day

Buying

Probably the best piece of advice to offer anyone considering buying a vintage electric is summed up in a single word... Don't! This might sound overly offputting, but it's well meant, as you need to be very aware that the vintage guitar market is a minefield sited in shark-infested seas, so casual dabbling is definitely to be discouraged! Really scrutinise the reasons why you want something old and expensive. Consider if you're purchasing as a player, collector or investor, as each category imposes different restrictions regarding condition, quality and value.

A vintage guitar is like a listed building: you must live with age-related limitations and there's only so much that can be altered before that intrinsic, and all-important originality is damaged or destroyed.

If this imposes serious performance problems, then buy modern instead; but if you're still determined to venture into the vintage arena then here are some vital points to bear in mind, all inextricably interactive and intended to help stop you being burned in a big, and expensive, way.

1 KNOWLEDGE

Focus on a certain make, model, year, colour, value etc. and knowledge is power, so swot up on the subject via the many means available these days. Books and the internet are obvious sources of information, although be aware that the latter offers hard fact and opinionated fiction in equal measure, so accuracy isn't always ensured. Try to seek an unbiased opinion regarding true worth, although this can be hard, as many experts also happen to be dealers and therefore might have a hidden agenda.

2 BUDGET

Money is a major consideration, but be prepared to fork out far more than maybe you ever imagined. Buy the best you can possibly afford, because, although the dosh demanded now might seem unrealistic, in a few years' time it should hopefully seem much more reasonable, which is a sure indication of a good investment.

Paying over the odds ought to ensure extra insurance concerning originality and authenticity, but it isn't a consistent or concrete guarantee. Over-abundant outlay can also ruin the enjoyment of ownership, breeding worry that every little screw and

solder joint is 100 per cent kosher. Playing the waiting game can pay dividends, although if values continue to rise, you'll never catch up. Set your sights lower if necessary, but don't buy something you hate just because it's a good deal; after all, we're not talking coins or stamps here, but instruments that should appeal on many levels.

3 CONDITION

Remember that old isn't necessarily best. Big money breeds greater hype and over-exaggerated claims about originality and authenticity, with terms such as 'mint' and 'straight' open to widely varying interpretation. All departures from factory-fresh seriously decrease value, but can be very difficult to spot; and deception is rife, believe us! General wear and associated repairs, such as a re-fret, are to be expected and tolerated if reflected in the asking price. While major, irreversible mods are a definite no-no, incorrect components can be replaced with genuine original parts – although these can also command big money, too, of course, so their cost really should enter into your overall equation.

4 WHERE TO BUY

Always purchase in person if at all possible. It rarely pays to buy sight unseen at any price, but especially so regarding seriously high-end oldies. This essentially eliminates Ebay at the top level, because photos flatter to deceive, as do supposedly accurate descriptions. Classified ads pose similar problems, but buying from a respectable dealer (which is sometimes an oxymoron) should be safer, as you have a comeback if something isn't right. Purchasing from a private seller can prove cheaper, but there's a greater element of risk involved.

5 HOW TO BUY

Whether buying privately or from a shop, taking along a knowledgeable friend for informed support is a useful ploy. Thoroughly inspect the instrument, dismantling it as necessary and treat any refusal to let you have your way with it with suspicion. Beware of flowery accounts about one-ownership, deceased grandfather, etc – most are financially inspired fabrications. Don't be overly enthusiastic, and never let your heart rule your head. Ignore the initial asking price and be prepared to haggle accordingly.

Don't buy something just because it's a good deal; we're not talking coins or stamps, but guitars that should appeal on many levels



Beware any serious mods that will have an adverse effect on resale value



Selling

Don't dispose of an instrument during times of desperation. Ideally, you should always try and sell when you don't actually need to, so you can hold out for the figure you want. Watch seasonal market fluctuations (summer is usually slow, likewise pre-and post-Christmas) and target your sales period accordingly. Theoretically, it pays to hold onto a vintage instrument as long as possible, particularly an American-made example, as often, prices continue to rise and will therefore give a better return on your investment.

1 KNOWLEDGE

Make sure you know exactly what you're selling. This may seem obvious, but it's surprising just how many sellers actually have little real knowledge of their wares. Verify the year as exactly as possible and compile an accurate analysis of all features. This realistic assessment will help to determine the selling value, and can help put a potential purchaser's mind at rest.

2 PRICING

Arriving at an appropriate selling figure is tough, as there are no strict guidelines for pinpointing a price. In reality, any instrument is worth what someone will pay for it, so your asking figure should be flexible, to allow for haggling. Check out prices of similar instruments in other adverts, but remember that a private sale figure should be lower than

that charged by a dealer, as the latter has to factor in a profit margin to cover overheads.

3 CONDITION

Be as accurate as possible about what you're selling, especially if it's a vintage instrument where condition is a prime consideration. Don't overlook (unconsciously or otherwise) dings, dents or non-original component. This applies to verbal descriptions and even more so when compiling a written advert. Failure to be full, frank and fair will usually result in a swift comeback from an aggrieved buyer.

4 HOW TO SELL

Disposing of a vintage instrument is trickier than it may seem. Obvious routes, such as classified ads and Ebay, aren't always suitable for what is a much more specialised six-string. They can be employed of course, but be prepared to deal with timewasters, as well as being ready to do a lot of extra work, sending the photos, minutely detailed descriptions etc. necessary to satisfy a potential purchaser. Even a successful sale can turn sour if the buyer isn't happy, and then arguments begin over who's in the right.

Selling to, or via, a vintage-instrument dealer who has all the right connections avoids such hassles. You'll receive less than from a private sale, but this could be more than offset by the convenience of avoiding any comebacks and tyre-kickers. Oh, and good luck! **C**





CLASSIC & VINTAGE GUITARS

MARVELLOUS MISCELLANY

Historically, where America's guitar makers led, others have followed – but in doing so, the rest of the world's luthiers have created some unforgettable instruments. Here's a mouthwatering selection of one-offs, rarities and classic creations, from the best of the rest of the world



Brian May's 1964 Red Special

The guitar that a young Brian May created with his father in his workshop featured on almost every Queen hit, and became a true icon of rock

Author Simon Bradley – former *Guitarist* magazine stalwart and Queen's Greatest Fan™ – not only co-wrote the definitive book on Brian May's Red Special guitar; during the process, he actually helped take it apart, too, for a forensic examination of this unique, priceless and irreplaceable instrument. So no pressure, then. Simon takes up the story for us here...

"What is it about touching a famous guitar? It's only wood and metal, right? I've seen the smashed remains of a Hendrix-owned Strat up close, touched a Les Paul owned by Jimmy Page, and briefly played Alex Lifeson's original Gibson ES-345, and each time, I've experienced the same chill. Maybe the spirit of the great music played upon the instrument is to blame, or some sort of ethereal connection to the legendary player in question; I'm still not sure.

"I was lucky enough to get my hands on the Red Special for the first time in 1999, and was immediately struck by the neck; its girth was more substantial than any other electric I'd played and the action was almost impossibly low. Upon closer inspection, the guitar was in surprisingly good nick, especially considering the sheer amount of use it'd had over its life thus far. Yes, there

were plenty of nicks and marks on the body, but the fact that it worked so effectively – and that it still does – is testament to its hardy construction. It needs an urgent refret, too, but it's unlikely that Brian will feel the need to take that step.

"When I was putting the book *Brian May's Red Special* together, the team I was working with and I had long agreed that we should take the guitar apart, if we could persuade Brian into giving us the green light. Now, the guitar might mean something to us fans, but to Brian, it's a direct link back to his beloved father, not to mention a constant companion throughout Queen's meteoric career, from the dizzying highs to the crushing lows.

"He graciously gave us permission to perform what could have been considered an act of sacrilege and, months later, reverentially turning an original TriSonic over and over in my hands, I think I finally understood what I was feeling. In short, a kind of magic."



Brian May's Red Special is the definitive story of the world's most famous electric. Packed with detail and rare photos, it's out now, at £19.99, from Carlton Books



TIMELINE OF THE RED SPECIAL

1963 Construction begins on the Red Special. It was finished in October 1964

1966 The Red Special makes its first public appearance, at Putney's Molesey Boat Club

1970 Queen play their first show, in Truro

1976 Queen play Hyde Park in front of 150,000 fans

1981 131,000 fans see Queen play Estádio do Morumbi in São Paulo, Brazil

1984 Guild releases the first commercially available replica of the Red Special

1985 Queen play Wembley Stadium as part of Live Aid

1986 The Freddie-led lineup plays its final show, at Knebworth Park

2002 Brian plays on the roof of Buckingham Palace as part of the Golden Jubilee

2012 Brian and Roger play at the closing ceremony of the Olympic Summer Games in London

A close-up, low-angle shot of a guitar neck and headstock. The neck is made of a dark wood with a visible grain. The headstock is silver and features the brand name 'BURNS' in capital letters. Below 'BURNS', the word 'TRISOMIC' is partially visible. The tuning pegs are silver and show some wear. The guitar strings are made of a light-colored metal and are in sharp focus in the foreground, creating a diagonal line across the frame.

BURNS

TRISOMIC



- The bridge was made from a single piece of aluminium found in Harold May's workshop, and Brian filed and shaped it to a scrupulously-planned design before slicing it into six pieces. It's still original, although the roller saddles certainly aren't – the book details the inventive process involved in their manufacture
- After experiments with making his own pickups proved ultimately unsuccessful, Brian bought three Tri-Sonic single coils from the Burns music store, which at that time was located under the Centre Point building in Tottenham Court Road. The damage on the bridge pickup's casing, caused by Brian's sixpence picks, has all occurred since 1998





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1. The fingerboard is oak, stained black and coated with numerous layers of clear Rustins coating. It has a 7.25-inch radius that was meticulously hand-shaped by Brian, using planes, jigs and lots of sandpaper, and now resembles glass in both its feel and appearance. The 16 fret markers are hand-shaped mother-of-pearl shirt buttons, and Brian still possesses a handful of the spares that were liberated from his mother's sewing box

2. Brian's first guitar, an Egmond acoustic, had a zero fret, so he adapted the idea for the Red Special. The strings float within the nut slots, and tuning stability is maximised by the straight string-pull of the three-a-side headstock. The zero fret itself has been replaced over the years, and Brian keeps a box of spares close by

3. The original knobs were replaced by these ones made by Brian on a lathe just before Queen formed, around 1970. The sliver of yellow tape is a very recent addition and allows Brian to see where the knob is set during low stage lighting

4. The body, ingeniously fashioned from blockboard, is still in pretty good shape considering what it's been through, although it did need some extensive work when Greg Fryer undertook a complete restoration in 1998

5. Brian himself stuck this sixpence, one of thousands made to promote solo album, *Back To The Light*, to the Red Special's headstock. He did this around 1998

6. Along with the volume and tone pots, the machineheads are the only fixtures to have been regularly upgraded over the Red Special's life



'47 Levin Solist

A post-war sunburst Swedish archtop that would be a dream companion for any jazz player

Now, here's something you don't see every day: this smoky sunburst archtop comes from Swedish company Levin, most famous for producing the De Luxe, as played by Django Reinhardt and Duke Ellington Orchestra guitarist, Fred Guy. The guitar pictured is a Solist, as indicated by the engraving on the gold-plated tailpiece – but aside from that spelling anomaly, Levin displayed a keen eye for detail in building this instrument. With a Romanian spruce top, flame-maple back and sides, and body width of 445mm (17.5 inches), the Solist has an airy, midrangy quality to its projection. This example has seen a few upgrades over the years, too: a Shadow pickup has been fitted, along with a volume knob on the non-original scratchplate – this modification mirrors the Model 2 Solist, which was introduced in late 1947 with an optional pickup, before production ended 10 years later. Despite a buyout by Martin in 1973, the Levin factory closed its doors in 1979, but so long as there are well-loved examples such as this one still in use, the name on that distinctive headstock will live on.





c'63 Futurama II De Luxe

Retrofuturama is big business, and here's a prime example from Andy Fairweather-Low's collection

The Futurama marque was a brand applied to imported guitars by Selmer, a major importer of instruments to the UK in the 1960s. Futuramas originated in Japan, Czechoslovakia and Sweden, and the Futurama II De Luxe we see before us is a re-branded Hagstrom instrument. The distinctive look – an attractive Sky Blue-finished Strat-esque body and that 'cheesegrater'-esque grille between the pickups – was soon updated to incorporate a conventional scratchplate and contoured edges. This one belongs to stylish guitarist and celebrated sideman-to-the-stars Andy Fairweather-Low: he's played with the likes of Roger Waters, Eric Clapton and George Harrison, so we can definitely trust his judgement that this space oddity from a bygone era is a useful and desirable instrument in the present day.

'62 Vox Phantom VI

A striking design from Swinging London designed to offer pro players in the 1960s a British alternative

In 1962, Vox decided to create its own pro-grade guitar, partly to trade off the allure of Fender's solidbodies. The result, designed in conjunction with the London Design Centre, was a truly distinctive creation, with the modish angles of its pared-down body and the paddle-shaped headstock (manufactured by Italy's Eko) offering an eyecatching alternative to the US invaders.

This specimen, modified with Bigsby in place of the original vibrato assembly with spring damper and bridge P-90 in place of the third single coil, belongs to Andy Fairweather-Low.





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Teisco Spectrum V

This maverick vintage design with stereo options and endless voicings is a favourite among the stars

The future was a great place in the 1960s. But the question here is: how many things do you need on the front of your guitar? Clearly, the makers of the Spectrum were firmly in the 'more the better' camp. Those pickups are split for stereo purposes, and the six switches offer various pickup voicings. The Spectrum V commands respectable vintage prices, and this one impressed its owner, Andy Fairweather-Low.

"I like Teiscos," he told *Guitarist*. "The first time I saw Ry Cooder, I got a picture from a gig he did in Clearwater, Sausalito and I went, 'What's that?' So I had a word with [guitar tech] Alan Rogan and asked him what it was and he told me it was a Teisco. He was off with Pete Townshend a week later – and he came back with this Teisco, and I got a bass, too. "I played that for a couple of years, but I just got fed up with stringing it, because of the whammy bar. You've got to go up and over and all the rest. It just wasn't worth it. Although I thought it was a fabulous look."





c'64 Teisco TGR-1

Howlin' Wolf and Rory Gallagher both owned one of these all-in-one guitar-and-amp curios

Danelectro had its amp-in-the-case – pretty cool, huh? But in 1964, the Tokyo Electric Instrument And Sound Company (Teisco) went one better with the TGR-1, and built a three-inch speaker into the guitar body itself, relocating the volume and tone controls super-inconveniently above the strings. The amp put out ½-a-watt of power, and was powered by two nine-volt batteries. Depending on which brand it was selling under, the TRG-1 came in a number of permutations, including the squarer-bodied Silvertone 1487.

Far from the novelty item that it sounds, however, both Howlin' Wolf and Rory Gallagher played versions of the model, and this one belongs to US singer-songwriter, Jackson Browne.



THE FUTURE OF VINTAGE

Which vintage guitars should you buy? What is it like to play a truly classic guitar? So many questions. Let's ask some experts who've been close to some of the world's finest instruments what they think...



Tony Bacon

Guitar historian and author



Are vintage guitars still a sound investment?

“What’s that saying about being suspicious of anyone who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing? There’s no such thing as a sound investment, whatever your financial adviser might tell you, because no one can predict the future. But a guitar in the right hands (in other words yours) makes a much nicer noise than, say, a corporate bond.”

Which currently attainable models could go up in value?

“I have no idea. If you do feel like buying a guitar, buy it because you want to play it. And if it happens to go up in value, whoopee!”

If money were no object: what would be your ideal vintage guitar purchase as a player?

“I don’t know about you, but my fantasies change on a daily basis. Today, I’m finishing a book about Gibson SGs, so I really wouldn’t say no to a ’64 Standard, thanks very much.”

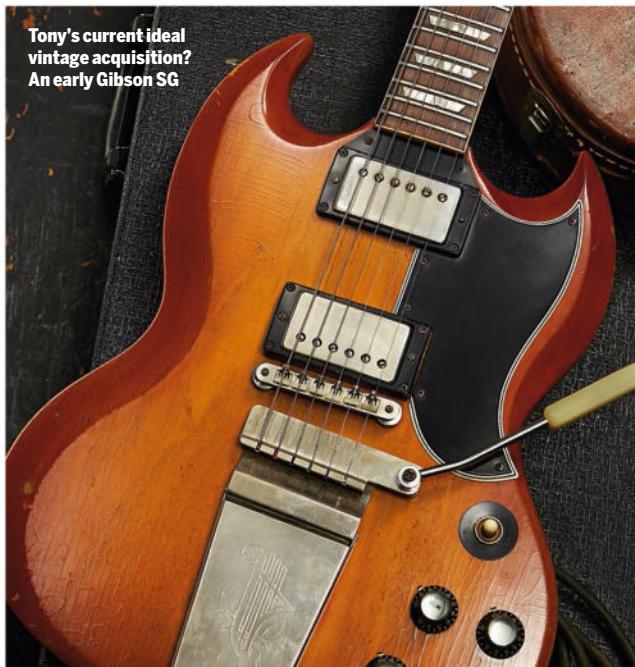
And as an investor?

“We can only see the future through the lens of the present. So make it a nice, dependable, always-useful Martin.”

What’s the standout vintage guitar you’ve ever played or been in the presence of, and why?

“Very hard, but I’ll choose two for now. The first was a 1920 Dyer Symphony harp guitar, owned by an American collector, an astonishing flat-top with a big extra bout that had six more resonator strings. As you played it, the extra body part made the sound build and bloom around itself and seem almost to become part of you, like no other guitar I’ve played before or since.

“The second was George Harrison’s psychedelic Strat, the one he played in the middle of an airfield in *Magical Mystery Tour*, for *I Am The Walrus*. We photographed it for one of my books, and it was a don’t-even-look-at-it moment. And a value-is-irrelevant moment, too. More of those, please.”



Nev sees the value in boutique guitars built in limited numbers, such as Nik Huber's Orca DSB, pictured here

Neville Marten

Editor, *Guitar Techniques*



Are vintage guitars still a sound investment?

“They are, but the vintage market took a battering during the recession and is only now picking up again. Just like stocks and shares, property and so on, the market will wax and wane and so should be looked at in the long term. Panic selling could cost!”

Which currently attainable guitars could go up in value?

“Collectability is closely linked to availability. So if manufacturers are building thousands of a particular model and every Joe can get one, it doesn’t take much to see that these may never appreciate significantly, if at all.

“Firms like Nik Huber near Frankfurt create stunning pieces in very limited numbers. Every one is sold almost before it reaches the shops and, while no one can be sure, I’d say these are as good a bet as any.”

If money were no object: what would be your ideal vintage guitar purchase as a player?

“A ’59 Gibson Les Paul Standard. There’s nothing quite like them: sweet, powerful, and what a musical heritage – Clapton, Jimmy Page, Peter Green, Mike Bloomfield, Paul Kossoff, Gary Moore, Billy Gibbons... wondrous!”

And as an investor?

“This is all about condition. Tatty ‘player’s guitars’ are great, but investors want museum quality. So, I’d look around for a pristine ’60s Fender Stratocaster in a custom colour from someone desperate to sell. Then never play it!”

What’s the standout vintage guitar you’ve ever played or been in the presence of, and why?

“Hendrix’s white 1968 Woodstock Strat. I was working as Fender’s UK guitar repairer, and I overhauled it, restrung and set it up when Experience drummer Mitch Mitchell brought it out to sell it. It was a definite ‘we are not worthy’ moment!”

Mick Taylor

Ex-editor, *Guitarist*



Are vintage guitars still a sound investment?

“I’m not sure they’ve ever been a ‘sound investment’, compared with the stock market or property, for example. There are – and will continue to be – windfalls for plenty of individuals on rare guitars, but the only people making serious money out of vintage guitars are serious vintage guitar dealers.”

Which currently attainable guitars could go up in value?

“Leaving out the obvious Holy Grails, there are plenty of 1940s and ’50s guitars outside of the obvious models that are starting to get more and more interest (and that aren’t really worth faking properly yet). Gibson ES-125s, 225s; various Gretches and so on. Les Paul Specials and Juniors can be fantastic, but it’s getting much harder to find an affordable one. Any Brazilian rosewood Martin (usually pre-1967) is worth a look, as long as you have the certification for the timbers. They’re only going up in value if they’re in good shape.”

If money were no object: what would be your ideal vintage guitar purchase as a player?

“Purely as a player, a ’62-ish custom-colour Strat. Or a blackguard Broad/No/Telecaster. I’d feel comfortable playing either, and wouldn’t be petrified about taking it out. You could knock it about and tell people it was a Relic!”

And as an investor?

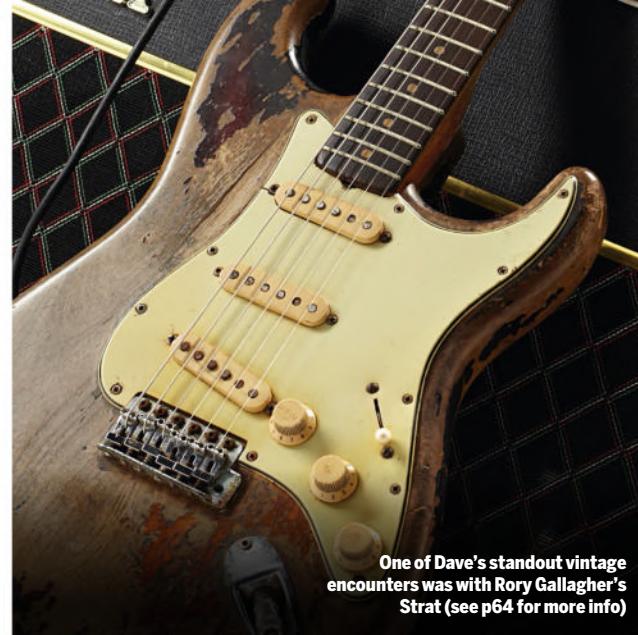
“There isn’t one. It goes against everything I believe in terms of what a guitar is for.”

What’s the standout vintage guitar you’ve ever played or been in the presence of, and why?

“Impossible! In the last week alone I’ve played a ’55 J-45, a ’59 ’Burst and a ’59 dot-neck ES-335. But it’s all for nothing if they’re not being used by somebody who is moved and inspired by them. Matt Schofield’s ’61 Strat; Philip Sayce’s ’63 Strat; Whit Smith’s ’46 L-5; Bonamassa’s ’53 Tele – being in the same room as those guys when they’re playing is when vintage guitars become really interesting to me.”



Vintage-wise, Mick would be more than happy with an early Telecaster. Or an early-60s Strat. Or a Nocaster...



One of Dave’s standout vintage encounters was with Rory Gallagher’s Strat (see p64 for more info)

Dave Burrluck

Reviews editor, *Guitarist*



Are vintage guitars still a sound investment?

“Were they ever? The ‘vintage market’ is just a construct so dealers, or anyone selling, can attach value to certain used guitars. Anyone trying to sell a so-called vintage guitar at the moment will be telling us the market is very slowly recovering from its slump but they would, wouldn’t they? It’s in their interest. But it remains, like any investment, a risk. Some can afford that risk, most of us can’t, and to be really successful you always have to buy and sell at the right time. But as an ‘investment in sound’ an old, used guitar can have a mojo that personally I find very inspiring.”

Which currently attainable guitars could go up in value?

“I’m not sure I’d want to suggest that *any* guitar will rise in value. Some new guitars do seem to hold their value more than others; Fender’s Custom Shop ‘relics’, for example, because they’re already dinged. It’s perhaps more the case of which instrument you’d lose less on when you come to sell it and in that regard, the biggest brands will always achieve a higher resale value in the general market, ‘vintage’ or otherwise.”

If money were no object: what would be your ideal vintage guitar purchase as a player?

“I think I’d find room for an original D’Angelico... a Selmer-Maccaferri used by Django: artisan-built or small workshop guitars – with a history – seem to me to have much more value, personally, than a factory build. I mean, I love old Fenders and Gibsons, but through the rock ‘n’ roll years, they were just factory creations churned out on a production line.”

And as an investor?

“I can’t comment if it’s just about making money. Personally, the only ‘vintage’ guitar I’d be interested in would be one that would combine obvious ‘investment’ potential with a whole heap of mojo and history. Just because a guitar was a limited edition, or colour, or something like that, so what? But a guitar with history, even if it was just a factory production, would be where I’d look. Paul Kossoff’s ’Burst, for example, for me ticks all the boxes. Conversely, Segovia’s Ramirez or Fleta... I’ll dream on.”

What’s the standout vintage guitar you’ve ever played or been in the presence of, and why?

“One of the standouts has to be Rory Gallagher’s famous Strat. It wasn’t a great guitar when I got to see it, it had at the time a pretty basic re-fret job, but just proves it’s the brain and fingers that make great music. And he did.”

Jamie Dickson

Editor, *Guitarist*



Are vintage guitars still a sound investment?

“As seasoned vintage guitar enthusiasts will tell you, the only really good reason to buy an old guitar is if you love it. If you take that as your starting point, it’s possible to speak of getting a good deal on a particular vintage guitar, if you didn’t pay over the notional odds for it. As far as crazily upward-spiralling values goes, though, the bubble has burst. The wealthy speculators who cared little about the instruments themselves but scented ‘investment potential’ have left the market to the real enthusiasts, allowing prices to settle to a more sensible level. So if you love an old guitar, feel reasonably confident that it won’t depreciate in value and don’t mind selling it one day, then you could be said to have made an ‘investment’ of sorts. But let’s be honest, that’s not really why you’re buying it, is it? Nor should it be.”

Which currently attainable guitars could go up in value?

“Auctioneers will tell you that the so-called ‘lawsuit’ Japanese guitars made by the likes of Greco and Burny in the 70s are going up in price currently and certainly they still represent an affordable first rung on the ladder of vintage guitar ownership. But, please, only buy a guitar if it makes you feel good today. There’s very little pleasure in stashing an unloved guitar under a bed for ten years to watch it plod upwards in value by a few hundred quid.”

If money were no object: what would be your ideal vintage guitar purchase as a player?

“A white, three-pickup ’61 Les Paul Custom would be my choice. I saw one in the first issue of *Guitarist* I ever bought and it has stayed with me as the epitome of vintage cool.”

And as an investor?

“There are plenty of guitars that are fun to own and play, but which are still hovering around the edges of mainstream desirability. A few years ago, the ES-330 used to be under-valued compared to ES-335s but they’re gathering momentum now price-wise, likewise nice old Juniors are getting quite pricey for what was built as a budget guitar. So I’d look to overlooked Gibson semis from the 50s such as the ES-225s. You can still get a lot for your money provided you don’t want one of the ‘household name’ models.”

What’s the standout vintage guitar you’ve ever played or been in the presence of, and why?

“An exceptionally clean ’54 Strat that a vintage guitar shop in Bath was selling and which I was lucky enough to have a chance to play. It was revelatory in so many ways – the body contours were sleeker and subtler than on later models and the pickups were brighter, hotter and harmonically richer than you might expect. The bridge pickup was almost as bright and ballsy as that of a good Telecaster, for example. The experience of playing a Strat in untamed, near-prototype form will stay with me.”

‘Lawsuit’-era Japanese guitars such as this Burny model may go up in value in the near future





CLASSIC & VINTAGE GUITARS

VINTAGE ALTERNATIVES

Can't, or don't want to, buy vintage? Don't worry: there are plenty of new 'old' guitars out there. Shhh... no one will know the difference

Words Dave Burrluck







PRS McCarty Singlecut
£6,000

For those who hear with their eyes, this is plain wrong. But sonically, it's one of the most 'Burst-like' modern guitars. Classic mahogany maple construction with the latest tweaked 57/08 PAF-alike pickups, this 'unofficial' production Private Stock guitar is one for the tone connoisseur.

ALSO TRY: PRS SC245 £3,150



Fender Road Worn '50S Telecaster
£1,162

The Mexican-made Road Worn range features a '50s and '60s Strat, '50s P and '60s J Bass, plus this Telecaster. These might lack the anorak-like detail of the American Vintage or the Custom Shop's more convincing ageing, but they are relatively affordable versions that are ideal for some extra DIY ageing and hot-rodding.

ALSO TRY: FENDER CLASSIC SERIES '50S TELECASTER LACQUER £994



Fender Custom 60th Anniversary 1954 Heavy Relic Stratocaster £4,234

Fender's Time Machine guitars are easily the closest to the real vintage deal that money can buy. This special model was released to celebrate this year's 60th Anniversary, along with non-Custom Shop American Vintage, American Standard and Classic Player celebrations. The heavy relic'ing looks as if it has been on the road for decades – you can almost smell the toil, sweat and beer.

ALSO TRY: FENDER ROAD WORN '60S STRATOCASTER £1,162



Fender American Vintage '65 Jazzmaster £2,146

Slavish repros from Fender's non-Custom Shop production range, American Vintage covers all the classics – Strat, Tele, Jazzmaster, Jaguar, and P and J Basses – in year-correct detail, but they are unaged. Thin nitro finishes, old-style fingerboard radius and frets, original circuits and period-correct pickups and hardware. If you want an unplayed 'vintage' classic, this is as close as you'll get.

ALSO TRY: SQUIER VINTAGE MODIFIED JAZZMASTER £346



Fender Classic Series '72 Telecaster Custom £1,054

These are the Mexican versions, if you like, of Fender's American Vintage. The long-running range includes the classic Strat and Tele models (including 'Lacquer' nitrocellulose models), plus more contemporary models such as the '69 Tele Thinline, '72 Tele Deluxe and '72 Tele Thinline, not to mention the '65 Mustang – one of the more affordable pre-CBS vintage guitars you can buy.

ALSO TRY: SQUIER AFFINITY SERIES TELECASTER £190



Gibson Historic Collection 'R9' 1959 Les Paul £4,349

Gibson admits that replicating its classics is an ongoing task, and each time it releases new models they're better than the ones before. The latest crop appeared in 2013: '56, '57, '58, '59 and '60 Les Pauls, an SG Standard and '59 and '63 ES-335s. Back in issue 373, we called this R9 "the most historically accurate Gibson Les Paul '59 Reissue to date." Nuff said.

ALSO TRY: GIBSON LES PAUL TRADITIONAL £1,699



Gibson Custom The Collector's Choice £5,000+

An ongoing series of replicas of famous vintage Les Pauls owned by collectors. It began with a repro of the Pete Green/Gary Moore guitar owned by Melvyn Franks. Collector Vic DaPra's 'Burst' is replicated as the Collector's Choice #9 1959 Les Paul 'Believer Burst'. There are plenty more, including the #8 Bernie Marsden 1959 Les Paul 'The Beast'. Each is aged to replicate the original.

ALSO TRY: GIBSON LES PAUL STUDIO SATIN £769



Gibson Memphis 50th Anniversary 1963 ES-335 £2,699

One of the absolute best new ES-335s we've encountered – play it at your peril. Gibson's Memphis division also produces the equally jaw-dropping Rusty Anderson, Rich Robinson and Luther Dickinson ES-335, a 1959 dot-inlaid version... we could go on. How about the ultimate jazz box: a 1959 ES-175? Most feature Gibson's highly evocative, lightly aged VOS finish. Stop!

ALSO TRY: GIBSON MEMPHIS ES-335 STUDIO £1,199



Gretsch G6136CST White Falcon
£10,906

The only guitar in Gretsch's USA Collection, this – as Gretsch states – is “based on the earliest White Falcon guitars of the mid-50s... as close as you can get, short of having a time machine. The DynaSonic pickups are recreated faithfully by Seymour Duncan.” Don’t even ask how much the original would be.

ALSO TRY: GRETsch G6136T £3,262

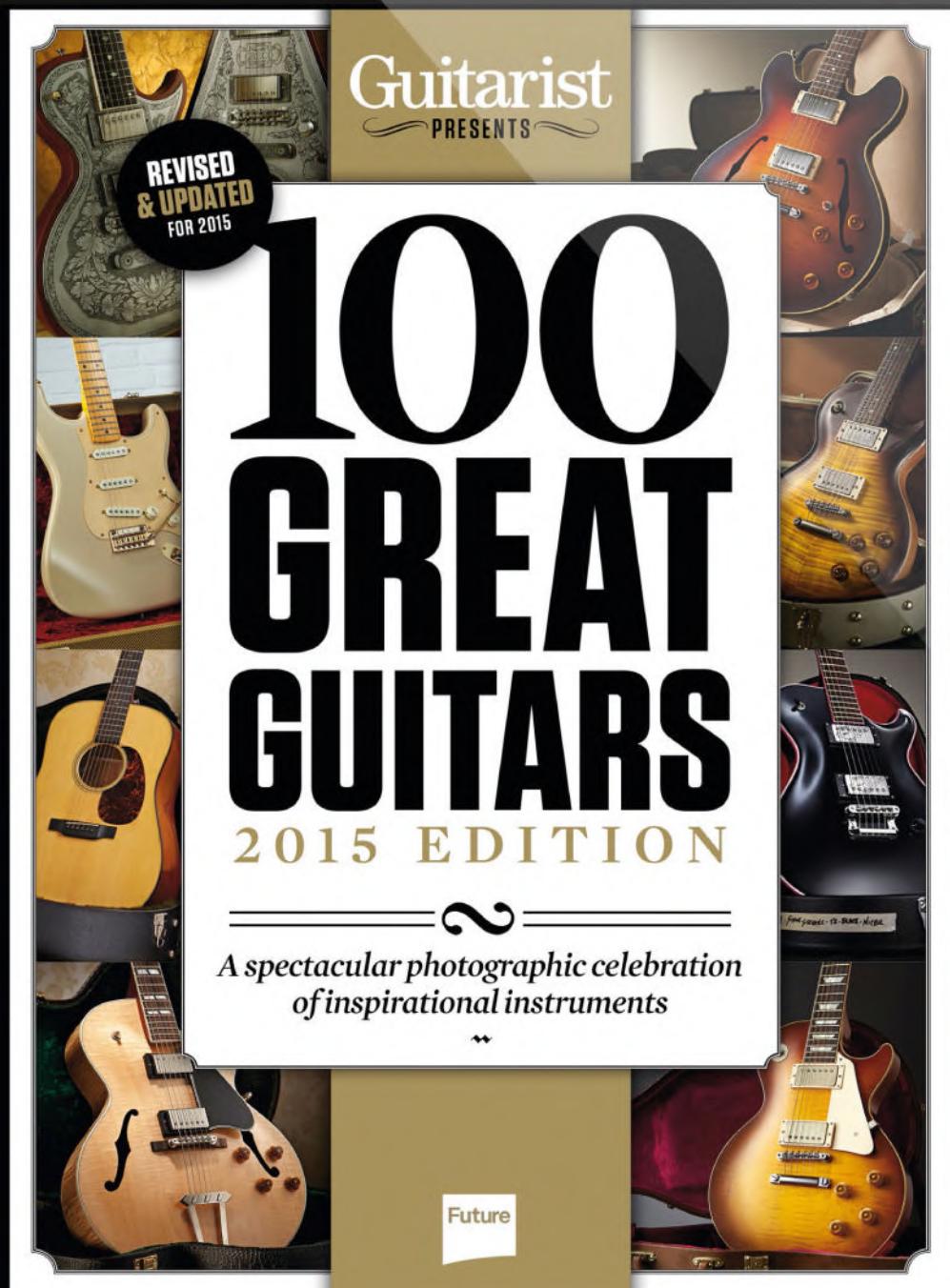


Guild Starfire V with Bigsby
£1,006

Guild electrics returned in 2013: some of the best vintage-accurate reissues we've seen in ages. Guild was owned until the middle of 2014 by Fender, but the brand now has new owners and, at the time of writing, we don't know if we'll see these guitars again. There are some excellent deals in-store for those that remain.

ALSO TRY: EASTWOOD SUPRO DUAL TONE £499

Guitarist
PRESENTS

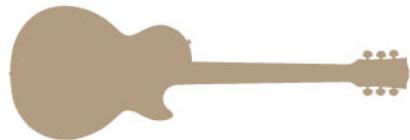


New updated and revised 2015 edition,
available now in print and via the App Store



VINTAGE VALUES

Then and now – a just-for-fun look at the historical worth of various vintage guitars



'59 'BURST GIBSON
LES PAUL STANDARD

\$280

1959 LIST PRICE

1959 PRICE IN 2015 MONEY £1,423

2015 AUCTION ESTIMATE*

£70,000 – £100,000

GIBSON
'58 FLYING V

1958 LIST PRICE

\$249.50 (£89)

1958 PRICE IN
2015 MONEY

£1,311

2015 AUCTION ESTIMATE*

£100,000 – £150,000

£89

FENDER
'54 STRATOCASTER

1954 LIST PRICE \$249.50 (£89)

1954 PRICE IN 2015 MONEY £1,408

2015 AUCTION ESTIMATE*

£10,000 – £15,000

FENDER 1951 'NOCASTER'

1951 LIST PRICE \$170 (£60) 1951 PRICE IN 2015 MONEY £992

2015 AUCTION ESTIMATE* £12,000 – £16,000



SAFE AS HOUSES

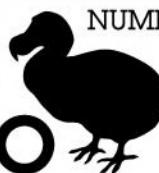
AVERAGE UK HOUSE PRICE IN 1959 £2,410

**24X GIBSON LES
PAUL 'BURSTS**

AVERAGE UK HOUSE PRICE IN 2015 £193,048

2X GIBSON LES PAUL 'BURSTS

**RARE AS
DODO
DO-DO**



NUMBER OF STRADIVARIUS VIOLINS FROM 1700s

THOUGHT TO STILL EXIST

RECORD PRICE PAID (IN 2011) 600

\$15.6 MILLION

NUMBER OF 1958 – 1960 SUNBURST
LES PAULS THOUGHT TO STILL EXIST 1,500
ASKING PRICE FOR MODEL OWNED
BY PETER GREEN & GARY MOORE

\$2M



**GRETsch
WHITE
PENGUIN**

1959 LIST PRICE

\$490 (£175)

1959 PRICE IN

**2015
MONEY £2,557**

2015 AUCTION
ESTIMATE*

**£30,000 –
£40,000**

AUCTIONEER'S NOTE: These are auction open-market estimates, which vary from what a high-end dealer would charge. They are also based on guitars being fairly good condition, and original. Estimates are what auctioneers would expect to achieve at hammer price, before the 20 per cent buyer's premium is added on top (which would equate to the actual open market value). Thanks to Gardiner Houlgate for these estimates.



CLASSIC & VINTAGE
GUITARS



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